

OPINION 6

TASKS FOR NEW REGIME
IN TURBULENT TIMES

WORLD 8

UK PM LOSES MP AMID CHARGE
OF INCOMPETENCE

MONEY 10

SEBI ISSUES PERIODIC REPORTING
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Unholy Dip: Hindu numbers shrink by eight per cent

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A study titled "Share of Religious Minorities - A Cross Country Analysis (1950-2015)" by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has revealed that the population share of the majority religion in India (Hindus) declined sharply by 7.8 per cent between 1950 and 2015, while a number of neighbouring countries saw a jump in the population of their majority community.

While the Hindu population shrunk in India, the share of minorities, including Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and Sikhs, went up. However, the number of Jains and Parsis in the population saw mix decrease. Between 1950 and 2015, the Muslim population share in India surged by 43.15 per cent, Christians saw a 5.38 per cent increase, Sikhs a 6.58 per cent rise, and Buddhists a slight increase. The study, released in May 2024, assessed trends in 167 countries across the world. The authors of

the study say, "India's performance is consistent with the larger global trends." The study highlighted that the share of the majority Hindu population decreased by 7.82 per cent between 1950 and 2015 (from 84.68 per cent to 78.06 per cent) in India. The share of Hindus in India's population saw a decrease from 84 per cent in 1950 to 78 per cent in 2015, while that of Muslims witnessed an increase from 9.84 per cent to 14.09 per cent in the same period (of 65 years). "The share of Muslim population



in 1950 was 9.84 per cent and increased to 14.09 per cent in 2015 — a 43.15 per cent increase in their share. The share of Christian population rose from 2.24 per cent to 2.36 per cent — an increase of 5.38 per cent between 1950 and 2015. The share of Sikh population increased from 1.24 per cent in 1950 to 1.85 per cent in 2015 — a 6.58 per cent rise in their share. Even the share of the Buddhist population witnessed a noticeable increase from 0.05 per cent in 1950 to 0.81 per cent. On the other

hand, the share of Jains in the population of India decreased from 0.45 per cent in 1950 to 0.36 per cent in 2015. The share of the Parsi population in India witnessed a stark 85 per cent decline, reducing from 0.03 per cent share in 1950 to 0.004 per cent in 2015," it said. The shrinking of the majority population in India (by 7.8 per cent) is the second most significant decline in the immediate neighbourhood, just after Myanmar's 10 per cent.

Apart from India, Nepal's majority community (Hindu) saw a 3.6 per cent decline in its share of the country's population. Buddhists, who constituted 11 per cent of the population in 1950 also witnessed a 25 per cent decrease and their share was reduced to 8 per cent in 2015. On the other hand, the share of Muslim population increased from 2.6 per cent to 4.6 per cent — a jump of 75 per cent. In 1950, the share of Christian population in Nepal was approximately zero.

PM schools Sam on Indianness

PITRODA SAYS SOUTH INDIANS LOOK LIKE AFRICANS, QUILTS AFTER OUTRAGE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In the midst of a high-voltage Lok Sabha poll campaign, Congress leader Sam Pitroda once again handed enough ammunition to the BJP with his analogy depicting India's diversity. Slamming his comments as "racist", Prime Minister Narendra Modi pounced on Pitroda's comment to hit out at the grand old party and asserted that people will not tolerate attempts to insult them based on their skin colour.

Later Pitroda was forced to resign as the chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress after his controversial



remarks as the INDIA Bloc leaders too disapproved of his 'racist' comments. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said party chief Mallikarjun Kharge has accepted Pitroda's decision. At his rallies in Telangana,

Modi said he is livid with the racial profiling of Indians by the US-based "philosopher and uncle of shehzada (Rahul Gandhi)", and linked the Congress's opposition to Droupadi Murmu's presidential bid to its

mindset, which saw her as an "African" because of the colour of her skin. "I am very angry today. I do not get angry if someone abuses me. Today, the philosopher of 'shehzada' (prince) has inflicted such a big abuse that I am full of anger. Will people's abilities in our country be decided by the colour of their skin? Who has allowed the shehzada to play this game of skin?" Modi said.

As Pitroda's remarks went viral and triggered a political firestorm, the Congress once again in a weeks' time distanced itself from its overseas wing chairperson's remarks and even criticised those as "most unfortunate

and unacceptable". The BJP dismissed the Congress's stand as meaningless as it cited Pitroda's close association with the Gandhi family and launched a blistering attack. Pitroda's comments at a podcast landed his party in yet another soup, soon after his reference to inheritance tax in the United States as an "interesting law" while discussing the

Congress's Lok Sabha poll manifesto gave the ruling BJP a potent handle to accuse the opposition party of eyeing citizens' assets as part of its "redistribution of wealth" policy.

Modi questions Rahul's silence on Ambani, Adani

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

Following the trend of low voter turnout continuing in the Lok Sabha elections, even in the third phase, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a frontal attack on the Opposition led by Congress, claiming their campaign was funded by black money.

This prompted a terse response from the Congress, which said the BJP has realised it is "shaking" after three phases and has now started attacking its own "friends," showing the "real trend" of the result." In a public speech, the PM asked the INDIA Bloc leader Rahul Gandhi as to why he



has stopped criticising corporate giants like Adani and Ambani?. Modi on Wednesday for the first time during the election campaign accused the Congress of having a nexus with "Ambani and Adani", and asked if the party has received "tempo loads of black money" from the two businessmen as Rahul has now stopped "abusing" them.

In what appeared to be changing the narrative on

the issue that was until now used by the Congress to attack Modi and his Government at the Centre, the PM also demanded that the party should explain to people why it has stopped raising the 'Ambani-Adani' issue as its 'shehzada' used to do for the past five years and asked if it has struck a 'sauda' (deal).

The Congress has been accusing the Prime Minister of favouring the top five industrialists in the country, including Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani. Congress said the man who collected ₹8,200 crore of Electoral Bonds for his party — a scam so egregious that even the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional — is today levelling allegations on others.

Soaring Mercury takes a toll on tiny tots

SHRI RAM SHAW ■ RAIPUR

The temperature has already crossed 42 degrees Celsius in many parts of Chhattisgarh. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast heat wave to severe heat wave in the state till May 9. The soaring summer temperature is taking a toll on the health of small children and the elderly as well. Many hospitals are flooded with cases of diarrhoea, heat stroke, food poisoning and vomiting.

Dr. Nilay Mozakar, a child specialist in the district hospital at Raipur, admitted that such cases are reported in large numbers every day. "A hundred patients are coming in the OPD... About 500 patients are coming to the hospital every month plagued by such cases. Most have been admitted for treatment."

When contacted, Mihlesh Chaudhary, Chief Medical and Health Officer (CMHO), Raipur, said: "We are on election duty. We will discuss the matter once the elections are over."

Meanwhile, The Pioneer exclusively spoke with some senior doctors about the causes, symptoms, preventive and precautionary measures to be taken to remain safe during this period.

Dr Piyush Ranjan, a Senior Consultant and Vice Chairman, Department of Gastroenterology, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital: Due to extreme heat, multiple cases of diarrhoea, vomiting and dehydration come to the fore leading to increase in hospitalization. Rising temperature and humid air are highly conducive for propagation of



various bacteria like E. coli, Salmonella. In these weather conditions, these pathogens can grow in food and water and cause diarrhoea.

Ways to prevent it: Such cases increase during summer. Due to rising temperatures, there are increased chances of food and water getting contaminated with various microbes including bacteria and viruses. One should consume freshly cooked and hygienic food. Consumption of contaminated water should be avoided. Street food should be avoided. Keep leftover food in fridge.

Are children more affected? There is no specific age predilection for these infections. In children viral diarrhoea is more common. Children and elderly are more at risk of complications like dehydration.

Dr Neelam Mohan, Senior Director, Ped Gastroenterologist Hepatologist, Medanta Medicity: During the summer, there is an increase in incidence of food and water borne diseases due to water scarcity and easy food

contamination. Water scarcity may contribute to contaminations from animal and human faeces. Warmer weather leads to higher concentration of salmonella in contaminated foods, resulting in food borne infections. There is rapid growth of microbiological organisms such as typhoid, hepatitis A, campylobacter. At high temperature there is high bacterial growth rates. In addition, there are some viruses like Noro viruses which can give rise to stomach flu.

To prevent infection, it is extremely important to maintain food, water and hand hygiene. Especially with children, hand hygiene must be ensured and regular hand washing must be encouraged. It is often seen that during summer children may go out for picnic; food, water and hand safety are of prime importance. They must be encouraged to wash fruits and salads before eating. As children have narrow safety margin, they must immediately consult a doctor in case of fever, vomiting and diarrhoea.

To prevent dehydration, WHO ORS must be used after vomiting or diarrhoea. However, in case of excessive vomiting, fever, lethargy, decreased urine output, poor feeding or blood in stool, one must urgently contact a pediatrician or rush to hospital. One can prevent infection in children by using vaccine for typhoid and Hepatitis A along with Rota virus vaccine in infancy. Rota viral vaccine is now given under the National Immunization Programme as watery diarrhoea was an important cause of morbidity and mortality in children under five years of age.

Dr Sanjay Khanna, Director and HoD, Gastroenterology, Fortis Hospital, Shalimar Bagh: During hot weather, we often see a surge in stomach issues such as diarrhoea, vomiting and dehydration. The heat can make spoil food faster, leading to more bacteria in food and water. Additionally, when we sweat a lot, we lose fluids faster, making dehydration more likely.

Prevention is key to mitigating these risks. To stay healthy, it's important to handle food carefully, keep it cool and drink plenty of water. Sugary drinks and alcohol can make dehydration worse, so it's best to stick to water.

In the summer, there are more stomach problems because the heat helps bacteria grow, and people spend more time outside where food might not be stored safely. Children are especially at risk because they can get dehydrated more easily and might forget to drink enough water. It's crucial for parents to make sure kids drink plenty of fluids and wash their hands well.

Staff woes ground Air India Express flights

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Hundreds of passengers, including political leaders and workers, were left stranded and staged protests at various airports across the nation after Air India Express cancelled over 86 flights due to the cabin crew going on a "mass sick leave" on Tuesday night. The major airports — Kochi, Calicut, Delhi and Bengaluru — witnessed chaotic scenes as most flight disruptions happened here. The international and domestic flights were cancelled after about 300 senior cabin crew members reported sick at the last minute and switched off their mobile phones. According to sources, southern regions have reported major cancellations.

Air India Express CEO Alok Singh said there will be more curtailment of flights over the next few days amid cabin crew woes. "Flight curtailment being done to cope with non-availability of crew, recover schedules," the CEO said in a statement. Many of them said the delayed flights could result in them losing their jobs as their work visas were about to expire while some political leaders and workers could not reach their destinations to attend the rally of their leaders in the upcoming fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections. Passengers also complained that the airline provided no accommodation, leaving them stranded until their rescheduled flight takes off. Some passengers claimed they were forced to spend the night at the airport. Some of them claimed that they were informed about the cancellations after the completion of security checks.

AstraZeneca recalls Covid vaccine amid side effects storm

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Months after admitting Min a UK court that its COVID-19 vaccine, which is being sold as Covishield in India, may have a potential rare blood clot side effect known as Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), pharma giant AstraZeneca has recalled the jab made in collaboration with Oxford University.

The British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical company faces lawsuits from more than 50 alleged victims and their families who claim fatalities or permanent brain injuries following vaccination during Covid pandemic. The company's COVID-19 vaccine is being sold as Vaxzevria in Europe. AstraZeneca had in February this year admitted in the court that its COVID-19 vaccines could in very rare cases have the potential to cause Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), a condition that leads to blood clots and low platelet count. However, the company in a statement said that withdrawal has been initiated due to a surplus of available updated vaccines since the pandemic. It has voluntarily withdrawn the "marketing authorisation" for the vaccine within the European Union, and similar applications are expected to be made in other countries where the vaccine was approved. However, it remains unclear whether the vaccine will be withdrawn in India, where it is manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII). The SII has not yet commented on the developments.

The vaccine has come under the lens of the Supreme Court in India which two days ago agreed to hear a petition on a rare side-effect associated with the jab. A date for the hearing has not been set but Chief Justice of the Apex Court



Dr Chandrachud acknowledged the issue, which includes demands for an expert panel to investigate the side-effect and for the Government to provide compensation for families of those who may have died after taking the drug. An early hearing of the petition, though, has been ruled out. According to reports, the SII has a stock of 250 million doses of Covishield at its Pune facility, which could be used for any future eventuality. Sources at the SII had in 2022 indicated plans to halve the production of Covishield as it had a 500 million doses inventory at its facility. Half of these were finished doses, while the remaining were bulk doses that were not converted to formulation. Meanwhile, the European Medicines Agency, the medicines regulator for the European Union (EU), issued a notice on Tuesday to confirm that Vaxzevria — known as Covishield in India — is no longer authorised for use in the 27-member economic bloc after AstraZeneca (AZ) voluntarily withdrew its authorisation in March. "AstraZeneca has therefore taken the decision to initiate withdrawal of the marketing authorisations for Vaxzevria within Europe. We will now work with regulators and our partners to align on a clear path forward to conclude this chapter and significant contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic," it said.

India tops in dollar remittance with 111 billion paycheck

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

India received over USD 111 billion in remittances in 2022, the largest in the world, becoming the first country to reach and even surpass the USD 100 billion mark, the United Nations migration agency has said.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in its World Migration Report 2024 launched Tuesday, said in 2022, India, Mexico, China, the Philippines and France were the top five remittance recipient countries.

"India was well above the rest, receiving more than USD 111 billion, the first country to reach and even surpass the

USD 100 billion mark. Mexico was the second-largest remittance recipient in 2022, a position it also held in 2021 after overtaking China, which historically had been the second-biggest recipient after India," the report said. According to the report's data, India was the top country receiving remittances in 2010 (USD 53.48 billion), 2015 (USD 68.91 billion), and 2020 (USD 83.15 billion), with the remittances crossing the USD 100 billion mark to reach USD 111.22 billion in 2022.

It noted that with a very large number of migrant workers from the subregion, Southern Asia receives some of the largest inflows of remittances



globally. Three countries in Southern Asia-India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, rank among the top ten recipients of international remittances in the world, underscoring the significance of labour migration from the

subregion. "With India estimated to have received more than USD 111 billion in 2022, it is by far the largest recipient of international remittances in the world and the first country to ever reach that figure," the report said.

Pakistan and Bangladesh were the sixth and eighth largest international remittance recipients in 2022, receiving nearly USD 30 billion and USD 21.5 billion respectively.

The report however noted that while remittances remain a lifeline for many people in the subregion, migrant workers from these countries continue to face a myriad of risks, including financial exploitation, excessive financial debt due to migration costs, xenophobia and workplace abuses.

The Gulf States remain significant destinations for migrant workers from around the world, and the 2022 football World Cup further

underscored the importance of migrant labour to the subregion as well as rights violations.

Migrants continue to comprise high proportions of the total populations in many Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States.

In the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar, migrants made up 88 per cent, nearly 73 and 77 per cent of the national populations, respectively. Most migrants — many of whom come from countries such as India, Egypt, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Kenya — work in sectors such as construction, hospitality, security, domestic work and retail.

Enforcement drive against tax evading traders

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL
To facilitate smooth conduct of election, the enforcement agencies have been asked to prepare an action plan and take strict action against the traders issuing fake and bogus invoices, undeclared godowns and transportation of goods distributed for free. Following actions, an amount of Rs. 35.06 crores have been deposited from 143 traders. The tax evasion may even be higher. So far, prima facie money has been recovered from 93 businessmen against tax evasion amounting to Rs. 20.77 crores were deposited. Particularly in garments the amount was Rs. 2 crores, utensils/household items worth Rs. Rs 3.80 crore in mobile, electrical/electronic equipments. A total of Rs.

6.89 crore, Panmasala/Tobacco Products Rs. 3.00 crore and Mona/Bandi/precious metal jewelry etc. worth Rs. 4.12 crores were deposited. A sum of 14.29 crores has been recovered from a total of 50 businessmen dealing with export-oriented commodities like Iron & Steel, Construction Materials, Plastic Goods, Oil & Oil Seeds, Construction and Marriage Garden etc. Led by Commercial Tax Commissioner, Swatantra Kumar Singh, the State GST Department has identified doubtful registered taxpayers on the basis of prescribed parameters. Sector-wise analysis of information received from other states, data available on BIFA/GAIN, GST Prime, E-way bill Portal, Bo-web etc. was done. Data analysis of documents

used by businessmen to obtain registration, PAN numbers, e-mail addresses and other new registrations registered on mobile numbers was done along with confidential information obtained from the field. Freebies and evasion-prone commodities falling under a particular sector involved in tax evasion through undeclared godowns and undeclared stocks of businessmen related to garments/clothes, household items/utensils, mobiles, electronics, cosmetics, panmasala etc. Special enforcement action against possible tax evasion in connection with Lok Sabha elections, 2024 Data analysis of documents used by businessmen to obtain registration, PAN numbers, e-mail addresses and other new registrations registered on mobile num-

bers was done along with confidential information obtained from the field. While conducting investigation on sector specific freebies like garments/clothes, household items/utensils, mobiles, electronics, cosmetics, pan masala etc., a sum of Rs. 20.77 crores were deposited. Especially in garments the amount is Rs. 2 crores, wares/household goods worth Rs 3.80 crore in mobile, electrical/electronic equipment's. 6.89 Crore, Panmasala/Tobacco Products Rs. 3.00 crore and Mona/Bandi/precious metal jewelry etc. worth Rs. 4.12 crores were deposited. Commercial Tax Commissioner has conducted special investigation in 28 border districts of Madhya Pradesh for special investigation of vehicles transporting goods related to freebies and without valid documents like bill, e-way bill, wilty etc. under the investigation proceedings related to Lok Sabha General Election, 2024. Temporary check post and 12 mobile teams were formed. Thus, effective prevention of the tendency of tax evasion through enforcement actions taken under Section 67 of the GST Act, 2017 and checking of moving vehicles under Section 68 will prevent the loss of government revenue and ensure revenue security as intended by the Election Commission. As per the provisions of GST Act, 2017, the statutory process of ITC reversal, levy of interest and penalty is being initiated against all the traders.

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Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav attends a Kalsha event of noted spiritual leader of Malwa Sant Kamal Kishore Nagar in Pethlawad, Jabhua district Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

Crime branch nabs cheat absconding for one year

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL
The crime branch Bhopal arrested the accused, who committed fraud in the name of job and was absconding for a year, a fraud of Rs 60 lakh was committed by cheating people in the name of facilitating government jobs. One of the victims Ganpat Singh of Bijli Nagar Colony, Govindpura lodged a complaint against Pramod Mishra, Arun Mishra and Prakash Mishra for grabbing money on the pretext of getting a government job. The accused had cheated him of Rs 30 lakh on the pretext of getting a government job. When he asked for the return of Rs 30 lakh Pramod provided a cheque number 000011, dated 09/12/2022 of IDFC Bank, which he deposited in bank and that cheque got dishonoured, based on the complaint case under section 420, 467, 468, 471

of the IPC was registered. In which earlier two accused Prakash Mishra and Pramod Mishra, were arrested and presented in the court. The Crime Branch team received information that Arun Mishra, is roaming around and is planning to surrender in the court. After informing the senior officers about the information received, the accused was arrested near the district court and presented before the court. Bhopal Crime Branch has arrested the accused who was absconding for three years in the case of fraud of Rs 30 lakh. The accused had committed fraud in the name of getting a job. In this case, the police have already arrested two sons of the accused. The entire action has been carried out on the information of the informer. The accused had come to the court planning to surrender. According to the police, Arun

Mishra's father Sachchidanand Mishra (55) was a resident of village Surasakala and had cheated many people of about Rs 60 lakh in the name of government job. Complainant Ganpat Singh, father Raghunandan Singh (30), resident of Bijli Colony, Govindpura, had complained to the Crime Branch that Arun Mishra and his sons Prakash Mishra and Pramod Mishra had extorted about Rs 30 in the name of getting a government job. When the complainant asked for the money back, the accused gave her a check which bounced. After this, the complainant complained to the Crime Branch and after investigation, the police registered sections 420, 467, 468, 471 of IPC against all three and started investigation. In this case, two accused Prakash Mishra, father of Arun Mishra and Pramod Mishra, father of Arun Mishra, have been arrested and sent to jail.

Keep conducting awareness activities continuously: CEO to Collectors

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL
Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has instructed the concerned Collectors and District Election Officers to continuously conduct voter awareness activities for voting to be held on May 13 for the fourth phase of Lok Sabha Elections-2024. He said that they should directly contact the voters, communicate with them, resolve their doubts and in view of the heat, also tell them about the facilities available at the polling stations. He said that all necessary arrangements should be made so that citizens come to the polling booth to vote. Rajan was addressing the collectors and district election officers of 8 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies going for the fourth phase of voting through video conferencing on Wednesday.

Rajan said that for voter awareness, an action plan should be made at the local level and voters should be contacted door to door. Make elaborate arrangements to conduct smooth, seamless, fair and peaceful voting without any hindrance. In view of the heat, all other necessary arrangements including shade, cool water, seating arrangements, coolers, fans, medicines should be available at the polling stations. Rajan said that utmost caution and vigilance should be exercised during the elections. All officers should maintain their level of alertness to conduct elections in a free, fair, uninterrupted and peaceful manner. Rajan directed to make additional security arrangements in polling stations in vulnerable areas. Special security arrangements should be made

in buildings where there are five or more polling stations. Deploy additional polling personnel in polling stations where the number of voters is high. Rajan said that in the fourth phase, voting will be held on May 13 in a total of 18 thousand 7 polling stations of 8 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies. Out of these, web-casting will be done in 12 thousand 180 polling stations. He asked the Collectors and District Election Officers to install CCTV cameras inside and outside the critical polling stations to keep an eye on the elements creating obstruction in the voting. Also, make effective arrangements for monitoring of webcasting, so that if irregularities are seen in voting at any centre, immediate action can be taken. Rajan laid emphasis on conducting voter awareness activities on a large scale at every polling station to boost the voting turnout. He said that for this, "Chalein Booth Ki Ore" campaign should be launched. This message should reach every house and every voter connected to every polling station that everyone must exercise their franchise on May 13. All District Election Officers should form local teams for each polling station to go door-to-door to motivate citizens to cast their votes. With the assistance of this party encourage people to participate in voting on voting day as well. Rajan said that model polling centres should be established in all the districts, not only in rural areas but also in urban areas. The facilities of these centres should be such that more and more voters are motivated to cast their votes. Welcome the voters with refreshments. He

said that all appropriate arrangements should be made at the polling stations as well as at the polling material distribution sites. Arrangements like mini hospital, mini ICU can be made at the material distribution site. Provide cool refreshments to the polling parties. Rajan said that distribution of voter information slips is very important in increasing the voting percentage. Special attention should be paid to the distribution of voter slips. No voter should be deprived of getting the slip. It should be ensured that the slips reach cent percent voters. He said that voters should be made to understand that voter slip alone is not sufficient for voting. Along with the voter slip, they will have to bring alternative identity documents prescribed by the Election Commission of India.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav with BJP candidate Sudhir Gupta offers prayer at Lord Pashupati Temple during an election campaign for Lok Sabha elections in Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday. Pioneer photo

Passing out ceremony held at MCTE, Mhow

PNS ■ MHOW
Passing Out Ceremony of Technical Entry Scheme (TES) Course Ser 43 from Cadets Training Wing, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering (MCTE), Mhow was conducted on Wednesday with full military grandeur. The Ceremony, presided over by the Chief Guest, Lt Gen KH Gawas, PVSM, VSM, Commandant, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering (MCTE) and Col Commandant Corps of Signals, marked the culmination of three years of training of the Gentlemen Cadets (GCs) of the Passing Out Course at Cadets Training Wing and their transformation into young dynamic officers of the Indian Army, in the near future. Lt Gen KH Gawas, felicitated the proud award winners of



Chief Guest Lt Gen KH Gawas, PVSM, VSM, Commandant, Military College of Telecommunication Engineering (MCTE) and Col Commandant, Corps of Signals, presenting GOC-in-C ARTRAC Banner to Platoon Cadet Captain of Arjun Platoon, Champion Platoon during Passing Out Ceremony.

for their outstanding performance in academics and outdoor training. Platoon Cadet Captain Yash Vardhan was the proud recipient of the General Officer Commanding in Chief (GOC-in-C) Army Training Command (ARTRAC) Gold Medal for standing First in the overall order of merit. Wing Cadet Captain Yash Khatri was the recipient of the GOC-in-C ARTRAC Silver Medal and the GOC-in-C ARTRAC Bronze Medal was received by Platoon Cadet Captain Dharmendra Kumar. Arjun Platoon won the coveted GOC-in-C ARTRAC Banner for standing first amongst the four Platoons. These 16 Gentlemen Cadets will now proceed to Officers Training Academy, Gaya for Passing Out Parade before getting commissioned as officers in the Indian Army on Jun 08, 2024.

CEC congratulates Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Anupam Rajan

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL
All appropriate arrangements should be made so that citizens come to the polling stations to vote. Strict adherence to "Zero Tolerance for Violence" is must. Carry out special monitoring in the last 48 hours. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar reviewed the preparations for voting by discussing with the central observers appointed in all the Lok Sabha constituencies conducting polls in the fourth phase through video conferencing on Wednesday. Rajiv Kumar congratulated Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan on the peaceful completion of the third phase of voting in Madhya Pradesh. In VC, Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and Dr. S.S. Sandhu was also present. Chief Election Commissioner Kumar said that observers should make frequent visits. Ensure arrangements for tents, drinking water and ORS etc. for the voters in the

polling station. Collective efforts by the returning officers, observers, SVEEP nodal officers and the entire election team should be ensured to increase voting turnout. The Chief Election Commissioner said that the Commission is ready to help you round the clock. If there is any problem, please inform immediately. Your problem will be resolved immediately. It may be noted that voting will be held on May 13 in the fourth phase in Madhya Pradesh in the Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies number-21 Dewas (SC), number-22 Ujjain (SC), number-23 Mandsaur, number-24 Ratlam (ST), number-25 Dhar (ST), number-26 Indore, number 27 Khargone (ST) and number 28 Khandwa. Additional Chief Electoral Officer Rajesh Kumar Kaul, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Basant Kurre and Tarun Rathi and Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Pramod Kumar Shukla and other officers were present in the video conferencing.

Patients need to register on Aura scan

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL
It is now mandatory for patients coming to OPD of Hamidia Hospital to register through Aura Scan. The main reason for this is the increase in registration from 200 to 900 and as 2500 patients come to Hamidia daily. The biggest advantage of getting the registration done on mobile will be that the patient will not have to stand in the OPD queue for the doctor's prescription. This system has also been connected to the laboratory. That means patients will also get lab reports online. The trial of the new system has also now been completed. This has come into effect. The administration has also deployed volunteers for the convenience of the patients, who are helping the patients download the applications on their mobiles. Online appointments with doctors will also start through this medium. Apart from this, it will also be known whether the beds are vacant or not. Aaha (ABHA) app will have to be downloaded in the mobile, volunteers are also helping in the hospital. Bar codes have been installed in OPD. As soon as patients scan and enter their details, they will get an ID number.

Faculty Enrichment Programme held at Army Public School, Mhow

PNS ■ MHOW
Vini Jhariya, from Samarth Psychotherapy Counselling Centre addressed the APSM faculty on the topic "Behavioural issues of children and their management and different disabilities in children" on 8 May 2024. The speaker is specialized in assisting children facing emotional, behavioural, and developmental challenges. She apprised about slow learners, XXY syndrome and how teachers can support these students by providing visual aids, breaking tasks into manageable chunks and fostering social inclusive environment. About ADHD students who can be helped by implementing behaviour contacts and self-monitoring techniques. ODD students who can be helped by proper reinforcements. The Behavioural Modification Techniques such as positive reinforcement, differential reinforcement, token economy

system, self-monitoring and self-management were been explained with reference to Case Study. She encouraged the teachers to provide a deep understanding of the complexities of the human mind and supporting students with behavioural issues. In the workshop, the speaker enlightened on specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia, cerebral disorder, autism spectrum syndrome and approaches to meet the unique needs of children with special needs. She briefed the teachers about various activities suggested for slow learners. She stated that accept the sensitivity and need of special learners and consciously support them to lead a normal life. In her keynote address, she stated that facilitators can bring a great change in the life of these special students. Vini Jhariya was felicitated with a memento as a token of appreciation for sharing his expertise in helping and supporting the students with special needs.



Security personnel stand guard outside the old central jail where EVMs are kept in tight security, a day after the third phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Bhopal on Wednesday. Counting of votes will take place on June 04. Pioneer photo

Post creative videos, reels, memes on importance of voting

Bhopal: CEO Anupam Rajan, has urged State Icons, District Icons, Content Creators, and Influencers to create brief videos as part of the election campaign, themed "I AM Election Ambassador," to inspire voter participation in the democratic process. Encouraging young voters to actively engage in this celebration of democracy, he calls for them to share their inaugu-

ral voting experiences and sentiments. Emphasizing the significance of voting, fostering a sense of pride in this civic duty, and conveying the excitement of casting a ballot are key objectives. Voters are encouraged to produce short video clips showcasing these aspects and share them across various social media platforms. Rajan appealed to all citizens to

spread awareness in their neighbourhood. Tell them how to use the Election Commission's app, get their name in the voter list, polling station information and motivate them to cast their vote. Discuss the importance of voting with citizens and cast their vote with their relatives and friends. One can create reels and memes and tag them on various social media platforms including Instagram.

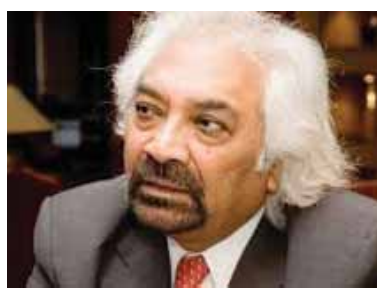
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BJP slams Congress over Pitroda remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After heading the Indian Overseas Congress for about two decades, Sam Pitroda, who was forced to resign from his post on Wednesday, had twice brought embarrassment for his party which is leading the crucial Opposition parties INDIA Bloc. The BJP latched on to Pitroda's remarks and said the Opposition party is getting increasingly unmasked as the Lok Sabha polls progress.

Senior BJP leaders Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Sudhanshu Trivedi said Pitroda has highlighted the idea of India that Congress bigwigs, such as Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, believe in. They claimed that Pitroda's "racist" comments have betrayed the Congress's bid to divide the country on the lines of race, religion and caste. Union Minister and BJP candidate from Amethi, Smriti Irani, alleged that it (Congress) tries to divide the countrymen on the basis of who is of which colour and who belongs to



which region. She also accused the Congress of always dividing the country in the name of religion and caste.

Even INDIA Bloc major stakeholder Aam Admi Party's AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said none of the members of the INDIA Bloc support Pitroda's remarks and accused the BJP of "hating" the Dalits.

Pitroda has been a "mentor" to Rahul Gandhi, who has often run down the Indian democracy and the country's institutions during his foreign trips, Chandrasekhar said while Trivedi

mentioned the ongoing Lok Sabha polls have now become a battle between those under the influence of a foreign mindset in their definition of India and an India that is "aatmanirbhar" (self-reliant) and brimming with self-pride.

"Sam, Pity-roda on you!" Union Minister Anurag Thakur said in a social media post. "While for us, all Indians look like Indians, the Congress insists on categorising them based on foreign ethnic lines such as Chinese, Arab, White and African. Only a party with a colonial mindset like Congress could indulge in such deplorable racism.

"Having failed to stir division between the north and the south, Congress now seems intent on sowing ethnic discord. It's only a matter of time before the Shehzaada, following in the footsteps of his mentor, champions this divisive strategy," Thakur said.

In the podcast interview to a media house, Pitroda said, "As a Gujarati, I love dosa, I love idli. That is my food,

that is no longer south Indian food. That is the India I believe in, where everybody has a place and everybody compromises a little bit.... That idea of India, which is rooted in democracy, freedom, liberty, fraternity, is being challenged by the Ram temple and Ram Navami and the prime minister going to temples all the time and talking not as a national leader, but as a leader of the BJP."

"That view centres around the Ram temple, god, history, heritage, Bhagwan Hanuman, Bajrang Dal and all kinds of issues. I respect their view. There is another group which says our founding fathers fought against the British Raj not for a Hindu Rashtra, but for a secular nation. Pakistan decided to create a nation based on religion and see what happened to them. We are a shining example of democracy in the world," Pitroda said.

Earlier, the Congress leader had stirred up a controversy by talking about the inheritance tax, which the BJP turned into a poll issue.

JP Nadda, Amit Malviya summoned by Bengaluru police over social media post

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Bengaluru Police has summoned BJP President J P Nadda and the party's IT cell head Amit Malviya in connection with a social media post allegedly intimidating members of SC and ST community not to vote for a particular candidate, officials said on Wednesday. They have been asked to join the probe at the High grounds police station here.

"For the purpose of investigation of the said case, you are hereby directed to appear before the undersigned investigation officer at 11 am at High grounds police station within seven days of receipt of this notice," the summons read.

The move comes after an FIR was registered against Nadda, Malviya and BJP's Karnataka unit chief B Y Vijayendra in connection with a social media following a complaint filed by the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPC) with the Election Commission and police on May 5 alleging violation of model code of conduct.

They were booked under sections of Representation of



People Act and section 505 (2) (Statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) of the Indian Penal Code, a senior police officer said.

In the complaint, the KPC cited the video uploaded on social media platform 'X' by the official account of Karnataka State BJP which, it alleged, is operated by Malviya, on instructions of Nadda and Vijayendra, BJP State President and Social Media incharge- Karnataka BJP, on May 4.

"The said video posted on social media featured animated characters of (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi and (Chief Minister) Siddaramaiah. In the clip, SC, ST and OBC community are portrayed as "eggs" in a nest and it also suggested Rahul Gandhi planting a big egg labelled as Muslim community. It is projected as though funds are being fed to the chick depicting the Muslim community, which then kicks out SC, ST and OBC community," it alleged.

"The act of the accused person (s) is to wantonly provoke rioting and promote enmity between different religions and is prejudicial to maintenance of harmony apart from intimidating members of SC/ST community not to vote for particular candidate and causing enmity against members of SC/ST community," the complaint alleged.

CBI takes over probe in INLD Haryana unit president murder case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has taken over the investigation into the killing of the Indian National Lok Dal's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker by

unidentified gunmen in February in Bahadurgarh near Delhi, officials said.

During the attack, three private gunmen hired by Rathee for security had also sustained injuries when the assailants opened fire on the former MLAs SUV.

The CBI has re-registered the

case on the recommendation of the Haryana government, the officials said, adding that it was routed to the agency by the Centre through a notification on April 26.

The central probe agency has named seven accused, including former BJP MLA Naresh Kaushik, in its case,

the officials said.

The other six accused are Karambir Rathee, Ramesh Rathee, Satish Rathee, Gaurav Rathee, Rahul and Kamal, they said.

They added that an FIR filed under IPC sections of criminal conspiracy, murder, among others has been filed

against the accused in the case.

The 67-year-old MLA from Bahadurgarh and INLD worker Jai Kishan were killed when unidentified assailants opened fire on Rathee's SUV on February 25. Rathee was elected from Bahadurgarh twice in 1996 and 2005.



MoU signed to enhance desi content in shipbuilding

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Jindal Steel and Power (JSP), on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here for the supply of indigenous marine grade steel to enhance the indigenous content in shipbuilding, defence ministry said here on Wednesday.

Giving details, officials said through this partnership, both entities have committed to foster indigenisation, enhance capabilities to produce and use these items in the Nation's interest.

The MoU underscores the importance of public-private

partnerships in addressing complex security challenges, emphasising the need for collaboration between government agencies and the private sector.

Several key benefits including quality, grades and dimensions along with the designated steel plants to manufacture the product are stipulated in the MoU as an assurance to the shipbuilding yards for a timely supply of marine-grade steel for the ICG.

The MoU was signed by Deputy Director General (Materiel & Maintenance), ICG IG HK Sharma and Chief Marketing Officer, JSP S K Pradhan in the presence of senior officers of the ICG.



IIT Madras raises ₹513 crore from its alumni, donors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras raised a record funding of Rs 513 crore from its alumni, industry and individual donors during 2023-24, officials said on Wednesday.

The institute also attracted total new pledges of Rs 717 crore from alumni and corporate partners during FY 2023-24.

"The funds received would be used for technology research and development as well as for deploying technology already built by IIT Madras, in various parts of the country based on the societal needs. In addition, it is also used to support deserving students with scholarships as well as the Sports Excellence Admission programme which is also being supported from this year's philanthropic funds

raised.

"Steep academic growth needs steep rise in funding. Thanks to all CSR partners and alumni of IIT Madras for trusting and support us in raising this all-time high quantum of funding," V Kamakoti, Director, IIT Madras said.

For the second consecutive year, the institute set a new record for the highest funding raised in one financial year by an academic institute to undertake tech research, student projects as well as to develop cutting-edge infrastructure in the campus.

"This historic high of Rs 513 crore is a 135 per cent increase from the amount raised in the previous financial year of 2022-23, when Rs 218 crore was raised. The number of donors giving over Rs one crore to the institute is 48 (16 alumni donors and 32 corporate

partners).

"The funds were raised from IIT Madras alumni and individual philanthropists in addition to the CSR (corporate social responsibility) funds and grants from Indian as well as multinational corporate firms," Kamakoti said.

The fund-raising was led by IIT Madras' Office of Institutional Advancement, overseen by the IIT Madras Alumni Charitable Trust.

The total amount raised through alumni alone during 2023-24 was Rs 367 crore, which is an increase of 282 per cent as compared to the previous year. Their focus areas included cutting-edge research across various social impact themes, infrastructure, and scholarships for students, besides establishing Chair Professorships for research in specific areas.

ICG rescues critically ill fisherman off Kerala Coast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) rescued a critically-ill fisherman from Indian Fishing Boat (IFB) Jazeera, about 40 nautical miles, off Beypore, Kerala on Tuesday, defence ministry said here on Wednesday.

Giving details, officials said the fisherman experienced a near-drowning incident after he fell into the sea. He was rescued by the IFB but his health condition deteriorated due to the excess water in the lungs.

The boat, then, made a



medical distress call, which was responded to by the ICG. It mobilised its advanced light helicopter with a medical team from Kochi, along with

Aryaman and C-404 ships. The ICG assets located the IFB and the patient was airlifted to Kochi. He was later shifted to a nearby hospital.

One lakh Thalassemia patients in India: Union Health Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While Thalassemia testing has been integrated into the reproductive and child health (RCH) programmes under the National Health Mission (NHM) in some States, it is yet to be universally adopted across all regions in addressing the prevalence of this genetic disorder.

Union Health Secretary Apurva Chandra on Wednesday advocated for inclusion of compulsory Thalassemia testing in the existing reproductive and child health (RCH) programmes under NHM as a means to curtail the prevalence of the disease even as he added that some States have included this in their public health programmes and activities; other States will be urged to include and expand screening and testing for Thalassemia.

He said timely detection and prevention are the most effective strategies to tackle the genetic disorder.

Chandra, who was speaking at an event here to mark the International Thalassemia Day, said there are almost 1 lakh Thalassemia patients in the country, with approximately 10,000 new cases reported each year. The



Secretary emphasized on the urgency for proactive intervention aided by timely detection through screening. Chandra also highlighted the critical need for wide awareness around the subject. He stated that "still many people are unaware of this disease and how this can be prevented. It is imperative that all stakeholders in this arena collaborate for a nationwide campaign to enhance awareness on Thalassemia."

Dr Rahul Bhargava Director, Department of Clinical Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplant, Fortis Hospital Gurugram said, "Thalassemia is an inherited disorder which affects millions of kids. We wish to see a thalassemia-free India by 2030. It is important that all future couples should be screened before pregnancy." He explained that in case one or both the parents have this condition, it is a good idea to consult the doctor to address the risk appropriately.

Prevention and early detection are perhaps the most feasible and cost-effective ways to control this disease. The need of the hour is an integrated plan of action including mass screening for carriers before marriage and before conception, said Dr Bhargava.

Some symptoms of thalassemia include weakness, fatigue, slow growth, pale appearance, abnormal swelling, abnormal bone structure (especially on the face and skull), heart problems, and iron overload. Thalassemia usually requires lifelong treatment with blood transfusions and medication. The main treatment methods are: blood transfusions, removing excess iron or chelation therapy, stem cell or bone marrow transplants, and treating other problems.

In addition, efforts must also be directed towards motivating gynaecologists and pathologists to ensure that every pregnant woman goes through the HbA2 test before 14 weeks of pregnancy as this can help in the timely diagnosis of thalassemia, said Dr Nita Radhakrishnan, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Pediatric Hematology Oncology, Post-Graduate Institute of Child Health, Noida.

Phase V LS polls: 695 candidates in fray

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 695 candidates are in the fray across 49 constituencies spread over eight states and Union territories in the upcoming fifth phase of the Lok Sabha polls on May 20, the Election Commission (EC) said on Wednesday.

The figure emerged after the scrutiny of 1,586 nomination forms filed for the fifth phase of the ongoing polls. Of the nominations, 749 were found



to be valid after the deadline for filing papers closed on May 3, according to a statement issued by the EC. The statement said 695 candidates will contest the polls from eight states and

Pradesh followed closely with 466 nominations, leading to 147 valid candidates across 14 constituencies.

The highest number of nominations in a single constituency was seen in Maharashtra's Chattr, which received 69 candidatures, followed by Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh with 67 nominations. Each constituency in the fifth phase is expected to witness an average of 14 contesting candidates, reflecting a diverse range of political options for the voters.

The state-wise breakdown of the nominations and valid candidates after the scrutiny showcases the dynamic electoral landscape across the country. Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal together form the crux of the fifth phase, encompassing a significant portion of the country's electorate, the statement said. Three phases of polling have so far been held in the seven-phase election.

Dietary guidelines released to prevent nutrient deficiencies

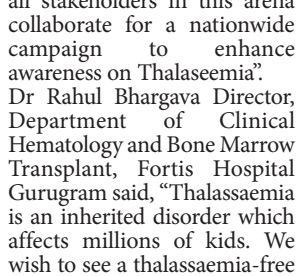
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN) have jointly released a comprehensive set of 17 dietary guidelines aimed at preventing nutrient deficiencies and addressing the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases in India.

These guidelines have undergone rigorous academic and scientific review to ensure their accuracy and effectiveness, said the top research bodies.

They "are designed as easily understandable and practicable approaches for ensuring diet diversity to meet the requirements of essential nutrients and prevent NCDs among people of all age groups across India."

The guidelines focus on eating a balanced diet; vegetables and legumes; nutrition for pregnant and lactating mothers; food for infants, children, and adolescents; including nutrient-rich foods for the elderly; eating safe, clean food; and drinking adequate amounts of water.



It also calls for avoiding protein supplements for building body mass, restricting salt intake, moderating intake of oil and fats, adopting a healthy lifestyle to prevent obesity, maintaining proper exercise, minimising

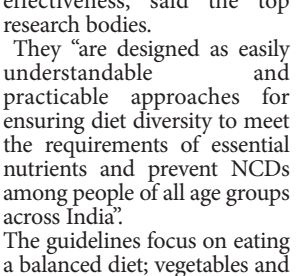
ultra-processed foods, and reading information on food labels to make informed and healthy food choices.

"The dietary habits of Indians have undergone significant changes over the past few decades, leading to an increase in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases while some of the problems of undernutrition continue to persist," said Rajiv Bahl, Secretary of the Department of Health Research, Director General, ICMR.

Rajiv noted that the guidelines have been made "very relevant to the changing food scenario in India with the addition of

practicable messages and suggestions on handling food safety, choosing minimally processed foods, the importance of food labels and physical activity."

Through the dietary guidelines, we emphasise that the most logical, sustainable, and long-term solution to all forms of malnutrition is ensuring the availability, accessibility, and affordability of nutrient-rich foods while promoting consumption of diverse foods," Hemalatha R., Director, ICMR-NIN and Chairperson of the Expert Committee which brought out the guidelines, added.



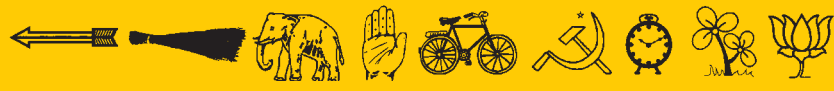
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Give grand welcome to PM during Patna roadshow, BJP urges people of Bihar

PTI ■ PATNA

The BJP on Wednesday exhorted supporters from across Bihar to converge in the state capital on Sunday to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi who will hold a roadshow in the city.

An appeal to the effect came at a joint press conference here, addressed by former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who is also the local MP, and Deputy Chief Minister cum state BJP president Samrat Choudhary, among others.

"Sifting through the pages of history I realise that never before has a prime minister held a roadshow in our city. At the most, Modi's predecessors have gone to Gandhi Maidan to give speeches," said Prasad, who is seeking re-election from the Patna Sahib seat.

He added, "I urge people from across the state to join us in welcoming the PM. Residents of the city are known for their love for Modi. I appeal to them to decorate their houses with flowers on May 12".

Speaking at the same press conference, Choudhary said the PM's roadshow will take place in the evening. Details of his programme will be available soon.

The BJP leaders bristled at RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav's taunt that "desperation" had driven the PM to hold a roadshow in a constituency which has always been



considered "a safe seat" for the saffron party.

"Does the prime minister need to get some special visa issued by Tejashwi Yadav to come here", Prasad asked even as he hit back at the former Bihar Deputy CM for raising a fresh demand for central status to Patna University.

"Tejashwi Yadav should tell us whether his father Lalu Prasad, who ruled Bihar for long and, later, became a minister in the Manmohan Singh cabinet, cared to raise these demands", said the Patna Sahib MP.

He added "The people of Bihar, though, should rest assured that whatever is needed for the state will be done by us. It was during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's time that the engineering college in Patna got upgraded to NIT. Modi's tenure saw the setting up of

an AIIMS here besides an IIM at Bodh Gaya".

Choudhary, who was earlier in the RJD, took potshots at Lalu Prasad for claiming credit for the implementation of the Mandal Commission when the latter was the Chief Minister of Bihar.

"Prasad is ailing and old age seems to have caused memory loss. He should take rest and recall that even the VP Singh government at the Centre at that time was way short of majority. BJP deserves its own share of credit for not just kamandal (Hindutva) but also Mandal", asserted Choudhary.

The state BJP president added, "Lalu Prasad should also remember that but for the support of our party, the Janata Dal could not have formed a government with him as the chief minister".

"The fact remains, Prasad has

always been intent on giving benefits of reservations and other facilities only to castes and communities he counts on as his supporters. The prime minister is right in flagging a conspiracy to steal benefits meant for SCs, STs and OBCs", alleged Choudhary.

"During the 15 years that Lalu Prasad and Rabri ruled Bihar by turns, only their family got all benefits. They keep peddling lies that the Constitution is under threat from BJP and Modi. Of course, we were opposed to bad laws like Article 370 which was scrapped", added Choudhary.

To Tejashwi Yadav's taunt that the opposition has forced the PM to hit the streets, the Bihar BJP chief responded: "Modi is a fakir (renunciate). Tejashwi and his father have deep pockets".

A question was posed to Ravi Shankar Prasad about the fresh controversy around "south Indians look like Africans" remark of Sam Pitroda, the technocrat who heads Indian Overseas Congress.

Prasad replied "he is known to be an advisor to Rahul Gandhi. I can now understand why the Congress leader often ends up with his foot in the mouth. The remark betrays Sam Pitroda's ignorance about the country and desperation over the imminent defeat of his favourite party".

Congress manifesto representing Muslim League, claims Yogi

PTI ■ GORAKHPUR (UP)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said the Congress manifesto is like a "new version of the Muslim League".

Addressing the media at the Gorakhnath temple premises, Adityanath said, "This is not a 'Nyay Patra', but 'Anyay Patra' towards the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Castes and Sanatana Dharma."

"A new version of the Muslim League has come. Nothing can be more shameful than the manifesto of the country's oldest political party, Congress, representing the Muslim League," he said, according to a statement issued in Lucknow.

When asked about Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's accusation that the BJP promotes hatred politics, the chief minister said that instead of telling white lies, she should at least develop a habit of speaking the truth.

These people won't be able to deceive the public anymore during the elections because the entire nation has come together in the vision of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, he added.

Escalating his attack on the Congress, Adityanath said everyone knows that the grand old party has "inherited the policy of divide and rule".

"In 1947, the Congress



allowed the cunning tactics of the British to succeed and divided the country. After independence, the Congress fuelled class struggles within the country based on caste, region and language due to political selfishness," Adityanath said.

"Terrorism, Naxalism and separatism, all of these are contributions of the Congress," he added.

"Who doesn't know what Sonia Gandhi did as the chairperson of the UPA from 2004 to 2014?" Adityanath said and added that Justice Ranganath Mishra Committee was formed to undermine OBC reservation. The chief minister said the committee even suggested allocating six per cent of the OBC reservation to the Muslims. The BJP and NDA opposed it at that time, and the Congress' plans could not materialize, he added.

Adityanath further said the Congress and its allies also attempted to encroach upon the rights of SC-ST communities.

During the Congress

government, there were attempts, as mentioned in the Sachar Committee report, to include some Muslim communities in the Scheduled Caste category. However, due to opposition from the NDA and BJP, the Congress' plans couldn't be fulfilled, he added.

The chief minister accused the Congress of implementing Section 370 in Kashmir and undermining OBC reservation in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

"The people of India will never allow the intention of the Congress to be fulfilled because divisive politics is not in anyone's interest," he added.

Adityanath emphasized the Congress' manifesto is of divisive nature, warning that it could lead India towards class conflicts and encroach upon the rights of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes.

He, however, expressed confidence the people of the nation will resist these plans of the Congress.

LS polls: EC puts Gujarat voter turnout at 59.51 per cent

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Gujarat has recorded an estimated voter turnout of 59.51 per cent in the elections to 25 Lok Sabha seats in the state, as per the data shared by the Election Commission of India on Wednesday.

The final figure would be available by evening after the addition of postal ballot data, an official said.

This time, the voter turnout is 4.6 per cent less compared to the 2019 general polls in the state.

In 2019, the state registered a voter turnout of 64.11 per cent in polls to the 26 Lok Sabha seats.

Voting was held in 25 Lok Sabha seats of Gujarat on Tuesday as the BJP recently bagged the Surat Lok Sabha seat uncontested.

"Gujarat has recorded an estimated voter turnout of 59.51 per cent," said a statement by the EC.

According to Gujarat's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) P Bharathi, the final voter turnout figures would be available by evening after the addition of postal ballot data.

"Polling station-wise data is now being fed into the system and postal ballots are yet to be counted.

"So there will be a slight increase in the final figure, not much. This 59.51 per cent turnout is almost final," said Bharathi.

Poverty to be fully eradicated from India in next 15 years: Rajnath

PTI ■ BHAWANIPATNA (ODISHA)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday claimed that poverty would be completely eradicated from India in the next 10-15 years and this is 'Modi Ki guarantee'.

Singh said this while addressing the BJP's 'Vijay Sankalp' rally here in the district headquarters town of Kalahandi.

"Though Congress leaders beginning from Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru to Indira Gandhi and Manmohan Singh all have promised to

end poverty, all of them have failed. However, our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has started the process to end poverty," he said.

Noting that about 25 crore people have been lifted from below the poverty line during the nine years rule of Modi, the Defence minister said that this was not the claim made by the BJP, but the report of Niti Aayog. No previous government had ever done so as Modi did in the last nine years, he claimed.

Singh said: "There will be no family in India which will not have a pucca house, pipe drinking water and LPG gas



connection in the next 5 years."

Recalling the Kalahandi situation, the BJP leader said that people from NGOs were coming to Kalahandi and writing articles on 'poverty tourism', as the place was known for hunger, starvation death and poverty. However, things have undergone a massive change during the nine-year rule of the Modi government at the Centre, he said.

While lauding the vocabulary skill of BJP's Kalahandi Lok Sabha candidate Malavika Devi, Singh appealed to the people of Kalahandi to vote for the

lotus symbol for proper highlighting of the local issues at the national level.

Quoting former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the expenditure of public money, Singh said: "Only 15 paise was reaching the beneficiary in the ground level if the Centre sent Rs 1 for the poor people. However, Modi's Jan-dhan account and direct bank transfer procedure ended the corruption and the people are getting the money sent by the Centre."

Appealing the people to install a BJP government in Odisha, Singh said that the BJP government will

implement the Ayushman Bharat health scheme as soon as a saffron government is formed in Odisha.

He said cutting across caste, creed and religion, all the people at the age of 70 years or above would be covered under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.

"Bring BJP government in Odisha, the state will implement Ayushman Bharat immediately," he said.

The Defence minister also claimed that during the Modi regime, terrorism has almost come to an end due to timely and strong action against terrorists. He,

however, said that there is a few sporadic cases of terrorism and it will completely vanish from Indian soil under the leadership of Modi.

Claiming that the BJP does what it says, Singh said the Modi government has abolished Article 370, ended the triple talaq practice and installed Sri Ram Lala's statue at Ayodhya as promised earlier.

He appealed to people to vote for BJP candidates contesting in Lok Sabha and Odisha Assembly polls. Lok Sabha and Assembly elections would be held simultaneously in Odisha.

Himachal: Only three women elected to Lok Sabha till date, just two in fray this time

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Only three women have made it to the Lok Sabha from Himachal Pradesh in the past 72 years and this time, just two are in the fray. Women constitute almost 49 per cent of the total voters in the state.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Chandresh Kumari and Pratibha Singh, the three successful candidates till now belonged to royal families.

Only the BJP and the BSP have nominated women candidates for the June 1 elections for the four Lok Sabha seats in the state.

While the BJP has fielded actor Kangana Ranaut from Mandi, Rekha Rani is contesting on a BSP ticket from Kangra.

"Women from humble background rising high in politics and carving a niche for themselves is still a big challenge in the country and Himachal Pradesh is no exception. At present, women constitute about 49 per cent of the total voters in the state but representation is not even one fourth and this is a cause of serious concern," said Ramesh Chauhan, head of the department of political science at Himachal Pradesh University.

In politics, what matters is who has the decision-making power. This power is normally with men and until women are given prominent positions, they would not emerge as "empowered" and surpass their dominant male counterparts, Chauhan told PTI.

According to Kamal Manohar Sharma, who also teaches political science at Himachal Pradesh University, the status of women has been high in the state and even before



reservation for women was introduced, women pradhans were elected in Mandi, Kinnaur and Kangra districts. But women were not so keen to climb the ladder to the assembly, he claimed.

Moreover, the political parties also did not promote or encourage the women with humble background, he added.

Political parties go all out to woo the women voters but when it comes to declaring candidates, women get few opportunities, the political experts felt.

To add to it, participation of women voters surpass male voters especially in rural areas but still few women get elected, they added.

A total of 56,38,422 voters - 28,79,200 male, 27,59,187 female and 35 third gender persons - are eligible to exercise their franchise for the seats of Hamirpur, Kangra, Mandi, and Shimla (SC) in the seventh and last phase of polling on June 1.

Amrit Kaur, India's first health minister who hailed from the royal family of Kapurthala, was elected to Lok Sabha from Mandi constituency in 1952. Thereafter, no woman got a ticket till 1984.

However, in 1984, Chandresh Kumari from the royal family of Jodhpur who was married in Himachal Pradesh, was fielded by the Congress from Kangra and won as the party swept the election, riding on the sympathy wave following the assassination of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi.

Pratibha Singh, wife of former chief minister Virbhadr Singh unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha polls in 1998. However, she won the elections in 2004 when her husband was the chief minister.

In 2009, Virbhadr Singh was elected to Lok Sabha from Mandi but he quit after becoming chief minister in 2012 and his wife Pratibha Singh won the by-election in 2013.

She again contested the Lok Sabha polls in 2014 but lost to Ram Swaroop of BJP, who was re-elected in 2019. But the seat fell vacant when Ram Swaroop died in March 2021 and Pratibha Singh won for the third time in the by-election held in November 2021 after the death of Virbhadr Singh.

In 2014, the AAP fielded Kargil war hero Capt Vikram Batra's mother Kamal Kanta Batra from Hamirpur but she polled only 15,329 votes and lost.

Even in the 68-member state assembly, the representation of women has been abysmally low and no woman was elected till 1967. Only one woman entered the assembly in 1977 and 2022. However, the highest number of seven women was elected to the state assembly in the 1998 elections.

So far, eight women have been elected to Rajya Sabha from the state.

Man live streams from poll booth in Gujarat, detained for bogus voting

PTI ■ DAHOD

A man has been detained after he live-streamed from inside a poll booth in the Dahod Lok Sabha constituency, officials said on Wednesday.

The Congress has claimed that the man, Vijay Bhabhor, is the son of a local BJP leader and accused him of "insulting democracy" by going live on Instagram from the booth.

The police in the state's Mahisagar district detained Bhabhor and another man after the opposition complained to the Election Commission with a copy of the video. Though Bhabhor deleted the video after it drew criticism, the clip had gone viral on social media by then.

The incident of a man relaying a video live on Instagram after going to a poll booth to cast his vote is being probed, Dahod Returning Officer Nirgude Babanrao said.

"We have received the video with a complaint and an investigation is underway," he said.

Of the 26 Lok Sabha seats in Gujarat, polling was held in 25 constituencies on Tuesday in the third phase of the general elections. The BJP candidate in Surat has won unopposed.

The incident happened at a polling booth at Parthampur in Mahisagar district under Dahod parliamentary constituency, Mahisagar Superintendent of Police Jaydeepsinh Jadeja said.



"We have detained two persons and action is being taken based on the FIR registered by the presiding officer under the Representative of the People Act for bogus voting," Jadeja said.

He said Bhabhor went to the poll booth to cast his vote at 5.49 pm and left by 5.54 pm. In those five minutes, he went live on Instagram and also allegedly cast votes on behalf of two other electors, resorting to bogus voting, he said.

Prabha Taviad is the Congress

candidate in the constituency. She is pitted against incumbent MP Jasvantsinh Bhabhor.

Congress claimed that the person who relayed the "booth capturing" video on Instagram is the son of a local BJP leader.

Congress spokesperson Manish Doshi said they have repolling at booth number 220 in Parthampur over the incident.

"Son of a BJP leader at Mahisagar played with the EVM machine and abused the Election Commission by creating a live video of booth capturing and thereby insulting democracy," Doshi said.

A Congress leader shared the purported video on his X handle. "BJP leader's son

Vijay Bhabhor captures the booth in Parthampur Village, Santrampur. He goes live on social media while doing the same and is seen threatening poll officials," he claimed.

The video shows Bhabhor purportedly focusing the camera on EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) and VVPAT (Voter verifiable paper audit Trail) machine and seeking five to ten minutes from a poll official even when he is asked to leave. Bhabhor purportedly also says that "only the BJP works here". His accomplice was also seen in the video.

"The machine belongs to my father. Only one thing works - that is BJP," says Bhabhor before pressing a button on the EVM, as per the video. "Only Vijay Bhabhor works here," he purportedly says.

INDIA Bloc will vanish once LS poll results are announced: Goa CM

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Pramod Sawant on Wednesday said the opposition's INDIA bloc will vanish once the results of the Lok Sabha elections are announced on June 4. He also said that some regional parties in Goa, who are constituents of the INDIA bloc, may even get merged with the Congress after the results.

Talking to reporters, CM Sawant predicted that the Bharatiya Janata Party's North Goa candidate Shripad Naik will win the election by a margin of more than one lakh votes, while its South Goa nominee Pallavi Dempo will bag the seat by a margin of 50,000 to 60,000 votes.

Naik and BJP's Goa unit president Sadanand Shet Tanavade were also present on the occasion. Sawant said the Congress has already conceded defeat and its leaders are admitting in private that they will be restricted to only four assembly constituencies (out of the total 40) in the State.

"The INDIA alliance will vanish once the Lok Sabha election results are announced. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will not be able to contest the next election as its leader and chief minister is in jail," he said, referring to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has been in jail following his arrest in the Delhi liquor policy case. "Some of the INDIA Bloc

partners in Goa who were more aggressive than the Congress may merge their party with the latter," he added.

According to the Goa CM, the BJP has fought this election on the issue of development, while the Congress was trying to rake up the issues of religion and caste during its campaign in the state.

"The Congress has nothing to project, hence they had to take support of the issues of caste and religion. They should have told people what they had done when they had a double-engine Government," he said, referring to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) dispensation that was in power between 2004 and 2014.

Priyanka campaigns for Rahul in Rae Bareilly

PTI ■ RAEBARELI (UP)

Hitting back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his Adani-Ambani jibe, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday charged that the BJP has a nexus with industrialists and waived their loans worth Rs 16 lakh crore.

She also alleged that the entire BJP machinery is engaged in spreading "lies" about Rahul Gandhi.

Referring to the prime minister's remarks at a rally in Telangana that the Congress should explain to people why it has stopped raising the 'Ambani-Adani' issue as its 'Shehzada' used to do for the past five years, Priyanka Gandhi said, "Today he (Modi) is saying Rahul does not take the name

of Adani, Ambani...He does so every day. He brings their truth in front of you every day".

"We say every day that they (BJP) have a nexus with industrialists. You must understand that Prime Minister Modi has waived off Rs 16 lakh crore of big billionaires. Whose money is this? This is not Modi ji's money. That is the country's money," she said at public meetings here while campaigning for her brother Rahul Gandhi from the family bastion.

BJP leaders are not even talking about inflation and unemployment. They will come here and in their speeches talk about religion, caste, temples and mosques but will not talk about your real problems," she said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The name game

Celebrities and influencers are equally liable for misleading endorsements, says the SC

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court has declared that celebrities and influencers are equally liable if they endorse misleading advertisements. Hearing a petition filed by the Indian Medical Association against Patanjali's advertisements, the Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah has come down heavily on the influencers and celebrities who feature in such adverts. In the age of social media, celebrities and influencers wield considerable influence, with millions of followers taking their word as gospel truth. In many instances, the endorsements are misleading or false, leading to consumer detriment and eroding trust in advertising. The Supreme Court's ruling represents a crucial step towards ensuring transparency and accountability in advertising practices. With millions of impressionable individuals looking up to them, these personalities possess a moral obligation to exercise due diligence while endorsing products or services. The failure to do so jeopardises consumer trust. Furthermore, the court emphasised the need for stricter regulations and enforcement mechanisms to deter deceptive advertising practices. While existing laws and guidelines provide some level of protection to consumers, they often fall short in holding celebrities and influencers accountable for their actions. The apex court's ruling sends out a clear message that no individual, regardless of their fame or influence, is allowed to mislead public for personal gains.



The ramifications of the Supreme Court's decision are far-reaching for celebrities and influencers alike. Moving forward, these individuals must exercise greater caution and diligence when entering into endorsement agreements. They are obligated to ensure that the products or services they endorse are truthful, substantiated and in compliance with advertising regulations. This heightened accountability serves as a powerful deterrent against unethical marketing practices and underscores the importance of transparency and authenticity in influencer partnerships. Of late, many film stars promote chewing pan masala under the guise of a mouth freshener. Other celebrities have promoted online gaming sites which are actually gambling sites smartly packaged as gaming sites. However, it is just the beginning and there is a long way to go before such advertising endorsements can be curbed. There have to be clear and concise guidelines (the existing ones are not enough) to stop surrogate ads. Moreover, to be fair to celebrities, they often do not know what they are promoting. Hollywood star Pierce Brosnan once featured in a chewing tobacco ad which he later said he was told was a mouth freshener. He can be given a long rope for not understanding the difference but Indian celebrities are supposed to know such underhand tactics. As celebrities and influencers navigate this evolving guideline, they must prioritise integrity and ethical conduct to maintain the trust and loyalty of their audience. This would be good for their reputation as well as for the society.

Foreign policy experts highlight India's growing concerns over China's increasing influence in the region, particularly its impact on security along the Line of Control (LOC). Consequently, the new administration must focus on devising a strategic plan, possibly in collaboration with the United States, to address these concerns. China's recent tactics involve enticing India's neighbours with debt policies and offering substantial loans for projects like the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and defence-related ventures. For instance, China signed a "military assistance" deal with the Maldives, providing non-lethal weapons and free training to Maldivian security forces, a significant

PICTALK



A child bathes his dog in a waterbody on a hot summer day, in Jammu

PTI

Insights into India's growing heart health crisis



NAVEEN BHAMRI

Aortic stenosis with a high mortality rate is a significant cardiovascular concern. Non-surgical aortic valve replacement emerges as a game-changer

Aortic stenosis stands as one of India's most prevalent valvular heart diseases, trailing only hypertension and coronary artery disease. Its prevalence surges with age, affecting roughly one in ten individuals aged 75 or older. The condition, characterised by a narrowing of the aortic valve opening, often manifests with symptoms such as chest pain, fatigue and shortness of breath, impacting the quality of life for affected individuals.



looked or misattributed to other causes. Nevertheless, recognising the significance of symptoms and promptly seeking medical attention is critical in mitigating the progression of the disease. For individuals diagnosed with aortic stenosis, heart valve replacement surgery often becomes a necessary course of action. This surgical intervention aims to repair or replace faulty heart valves, restoring proper blood flow and alleviating symptoms. According to a report by GlobalData, approximately 69,592 heart valve surgeries are conducted each year in India.

The heart's proper function relies on valves, ensuring blood flows in one direction. When valves malfunction, surgery becomes necessary to repair or replace them. This may involve fixing leaflets that don't open wide enough or don't close tightly, ensuring blood flows properly through

the heart chambers and arteries. Replacement valves can be sourced from animals, human tissue, or synthetic materials. **TAVI & TAVR for AS** Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation/Replacement (TAVI/TAVR) is a groundbreaking alternative procedure to open heart surgeries. TAVI/TAVR is a minimally invasive procedure that involves inserting a new valve inside the damaged aortic valve, often without removing the old valve entirely. The procedure itself involves inserting a catheter through an artery in the groin, which is then guided to the heart. The number of patients afflicted with blocked arteries and co-morbidities like hypertension, diabetes and chronic kidney disease is increasing day after day. The ideal solution for such patients is TAVI procedure, as it offers significant benefits over traditional treatments. However, only a small percentage end up opting for it. Addressing aortic stenosis early, especially in patients with multiple co-morbidities, is crucial for improving outcomes and enhancing quality of life.

TAVI Therapy Helps Mrs. Patel, a 78-year-old woman, was struggling with severe degenerative aortic stenosis. Mrs. Patel's condition, made it hard for blood to flow through her heart properly. This caused her heart to work harder, leading to symptoms like chest pain and feeling breathless. Her doctor suggested a treatment called TAVI (Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation), a less invasive procedure where a new valve is placed inside the damaged one. The deployment of the valve was successful, with Mrs. Patel responding positively to the procedure. Remarkably, within just three days, Mrs. Patel was discharged from the hospital. Subsequent assessments revealed no signs of valve issues or blockages in her heart. Her journey underscores the remarkable impact of interventions like TAVI in restoring health and well-being.

(The writer is Senior Director and Head of Interventional Cardiology at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi; views are personal)

Tasks for new regime in turbulent times



KS TOMAR

As the nation braces for a new Government, all eyes are on the horizon of challenges awaiting the new administration

Keeping in view the confidence of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister, Amit Shah and the BJP to cross a magic figure of "Chaar Sau Paar" nothing is certain in politics but a new regime will take shape in New Delhi after the results of general elections on June 4.

In this backdrop none can deny that the new regime is poised to confront hordes of new challenges which include giving top priority to advancements in emerging technologies, adapting to shifting geopolitical equations, the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and formulating a long-term strategy to counter China's expansionist policies and security threats in the region. These challenges are pivotal for India's aspirations to join the League of developed nations in the future.

Experts say that Indian PM, Narendra Modi's push for digital technologies which proved a boon during Covid-19 crisis for the delivery of services besides emphasising renewable energy, a mission mode to put India back on the map of semiconductors production, setting a new target in space arena and formulation of a strategy to accelerate India's capabilities in AI has helped India to position itself to give a fillip to innovate and catch up with the US and China which have been trying to master the technological revolution to be relevant in future.

Foreign policy experts highlight India's growing concerns over China's increasing influence in the region, particularly its impact on security along the Line of Control (LOC). Consequently, the new administration must focus on devising a strategic plan, possibly in collaboration with the United States, to address these concerns. China's recent tactics involve enticing India's neighbours with debt policies and offering substantial loans for projects like the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and defence-related ventures. For instance, China signed a "military assistance" deal with the Maldives, providing non-lethal weapons and free training to Maldivian security forces, a significant



departure from the earlier training provided by India and the United States.

Ahead lies the crucial task for New Delhi to formulate an ambitious and practical long-term plan to counter China's advancements in "new productive forces," a term coined by President Xi Jinping. This involves focusing on economic development through innovation in advanced sectors. China's aim to surpass the United States in the production of advanced science and technologies poses challenges for India as well. Therefore, India must intensify its efforts to support the United States in its global technology coalitions with allies like Japan, Australia and India, along with the CHIP Alliance, while fostering deep bilateral partnerships in emerging critical technologies.

China's expanding ties in the region are evident and India needs to tread cautiously to counter its influence, as seen in the case of Nepal. The recent political shift in Nepal towards a communist Government ideologically aligned with China is concerning, especially considering China's "Debt Trap" strategy. Pakistan serves as a stark example, with China extending a massive debt of \$23 billion, a substantial portion of which is tied to the Belt and Road Initiative, Pakistan's mounting debt to China, totalling \$67.2 billion from



AHEAD LIES THE CRUCIAL TASK FOR NEW DELHI TO FORMULATE AN AMBITIOUS AND PRACTICAL LONG-TERM PLAN TO COUNTER CHINA'S ADVANCEMENTS

2000 to 2021, underscores the risks associated with this debt dependency. Despite facing economic collapse, Pakistan remains indebted to China, highlighting the potential peril of falling into a debt trap. Experts suggest that the incoming Government in Delhi may find solace in the recent normalisation of ties with Sri Lanka. A severe economic crisis in Sri Lanka had pushed it perilously close to the edge, but India stepped in with a \$4 billion economic assistance package and humanitarian aid, surpassing even the IMF's 48-month special package to stabilise the country. This move showcased India's commitment beyond traditional diplomacy and responded to the dire needs of its neighbour. It's noteworthy that China, previously involved, withdrew its support, while India's intervention has been perceived positively, reflecting a shift in Sri Lanka's outlook. Interestingly, former president, Mahinda Rajapaksa had blamed India for interfering in the Sri Lanka elections which led to his ouster in 2015. The trend continued when Gotabaya Rajapaksa, president cancelled the East Container Terminal (ECT) agreement in the Colombo airport in violation of a 2019 project contract signed amongst three partners including Japan, India and Sri Lanka. Now Sri Lanka's speaker, Mehinda Yapa

Abeyardera thanked India for saving his country from the 'blood path' hence China stands exposed in the eyes of the people of this country. India's relations with Bangladesh remain strong, exemplified by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts. During a joint event on November 23, 2023, Modi referred to India as Bangladesh's largest development partner, emphasising mutual benefits.

One of the notable features of election campaigning by all parties, unlike developed nations, is the lack of debates, discussions and narratives to enlighten the people about the relevance and significance of foreign policy. The manifestoes may dwell upon foreign relations and future strategy but no effort is made to emphasise its importance in achieving the goal of joining the elite club of developed nations. India's independent stand to import crude oil from Russia, despite economic sanctions by the United States and allies owing to the Ukraine war, has demonstrated to the world that such decisions are primarily governed by keeping national interest supreme. India's strategic approach towards Maldives and Nepal needs to be flexible and innovative to counter China's growing influence effectively.

(The writer is a journalist and political analyst, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLL BATTLE CONTINUES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Poll battle enters crucial Phase III," published on May 7, this is my response. The upcoming third phase of Lok Sabha elections is poised to be a crucial battleground, with political heavyweights from both ruling and opposition parties vying for victory. The BJP, having secured a significant number of seats in the 2019 elections, faces the challenge of maintaining its dominance, especially in key States like Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. With over 1,300 candidates, including a notable presence of women, contesting across 12 States and Union Territories, the electoral landscape reflects a diverse array of voices. The extensive deployment of security forces underscores the significance of ensuring a free and fair electoral process.

Of particular interest are the contests in constituencies like Guna in Madhya Pradesh, where Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia seeks to reclaim lost ground and Baramati in Maharashtra, where dynastic politics adds an intriguing dimension to the electoral dynamics. As voter turnout fluctuates amidst challenging weather conditions, the outcome of this phase remains uncertain, with implications for the broader political landscape. It's a testament to the vibrancy of Indian democracy and the diverse aspirations of its citizens.

Anika Patel | Kolkata

CORAL CRISIS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Marine heatwave scorches pristine coral reefs of Lakshadweep," published on May 7, this is my response. As someone who reads the news daily, the plight of Lakshadweep's vibrant corals strikes a chord. It's disheartening to witness the gradual decline of such natural wonders due to prolonged marine heatwaves. Beyond the aesthetic loss, the ecosystem repercussions are immense. The warnings from scientists about coral bleaching and its cascading effects on marine life sound alarms for the delicate balance of nature.

More allegations against Kejriwal



Apropos the news article, "LG recommends ANIA probe against Kejriwal," published on May 7, this is my response. The recent recommendation for an ANIA probe against Arvind Kejriwal by Delhi's Lieutenant Governor raises serious concerns. The accusation of receiving funding from extremist groups is alarming and demands a thorough investigation. However, the

timing, just before the Supreme Court's bail consideration and the political backdrop surrounding it raise questions of motive and agenda. The intertwined narratives of terrorism, politics and justice in this case create a complex scenario. On one hand, there's the gravity of allegations involving a banned terrorist organisation; on the other, there are claims of political conspiracy and manipulation.

As a reader, navigating through these intricate details leaves one perplexed and sceptical. The need for transparency and impartiality in the investigation is paramount to uphold the integrity of the democratic process and ensure justice prevails. However, amidst the political fervour surrounding elections, separating truth from propaganda becomes increasingly challenging.

Vihaan Singh | Ahmedabad

Moreover, the socioeconomic impact on coastal communities underscores the urgent need for action.

The Government's attention to Lakshadweep's marine ecosystems is crucial, especially considering the region's ecological and economic significance. The initiatives by CMFRI to study and develop resilience-based strategies offer hope amidst the crisis. However, collective efforts are imperative to mitigate the escalating threats and safeguard these invaluable treasures for future generations. The news serves as a reminder of our responsibility to preserve and protect our natural heritage in the face of environmental challenges.

Aaradhya Sharma | Mumbai

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Madam — Apropos the news article, "CHHAYA: A contraceptive beyond family planning," published on May 6, this is my response. The recent approval of Centchroman, a non-hormonal contraceptive pill, signifies a significant stride in bolstering women's reproductive health rights. Branded as "Chhaya" in public health facilities and "SAHEL" in the mar-

ket, this pill offers a hormone-free alternative, expanding choices for family planning. Its versatility is commendable, catering to women regardless of age, marital status, or childbirth history. Notably, its compatibility with breastfeeding ensures maternal health without compromising lactation.

Centchroman's introduction aligns with India's commitment to reproductive rights and gender equality. By providing a safe and accessible contraceptive, the Government empowers women to make informed decisions, underscoring family planning as a human right crucial for social and economic development. However, dissemination of information remains pivotal. Comprehensive education on contraception can dispel misconceptions, enabling women to navigate their reproductive health confidently. In essence, Centchroman heralds a new era of inclusivity and empowerment, promising a future where women have agency over their bodies and futures.

Kabir Malhotra | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

PROFOUND INFLUENCE OF HABITS

Habits sculpt our lives by fostering discipline and perseverance



SAKSHI SETHI

In the words of F.M Alexander, 'People don't decide their futures. They decide their habits and their habits decide their futures.' From the moment we wake up to the moment we retire to bed, habits silently guide individual behaviours, often without even realising it. They can either propel us towards success or lead us down a path of mediocrity or failure. Habits have a profound impact on an individual's personal development and well-being. They are the fabric of daily existence, weaving through routines and decisions and ultimately, shaping the course of an individual's life. By establishing a consistent routine, an individual creates a framework within which they can operate efficiently and effectively.

The individual becomes disciplined and learns self-control and perseverance... the qualities that are essential for achieving long-term goals and overcoming obstacles. Habits play a crucial role in the social sphere, shaping relationships and interactions with others. They are the invisible architects of every individual's life, decisions and ultimately, destiny. Shared habits, such as participating in team sports or volunteering in the community, foster a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it is the habits that dictate what an individual eats, how the free time is to be spent and even which people to surround with. By understanding and intentionally cultivating positive habits, one can steer oneself towards choices that align with their goals and values. Undoubtedly, habits are the silent architects of one's actions, often operating beneath the conscious awareness yet exerting a profound influence on thoughts.



By establishing a consistent routine, one can create a framework within which they can operate efficiently and effectively. Habits indeed hold far more significance in everyone's life than one can often realise. From the moment an individual wakes up until they retire to bed, habits silently guide behaviours, often influencing outcomes far more than one can acknowledge. One of the most powerful aspects of habits is their ability to create momentum. Once a habit is established, it becomes easier to maintain and even expand upon. This momentum propels the individual to move forward, making it easier to achieve their goals and aspirations. By starting with small, achievable habits and gradually building upon them, one can harness this momentum to make positive changes in their life.

There is no denying the fact that good habits lie behind many of the positive changes while conversely, negative habits, such as procrastination, excessive screen time and unhealthy habits, hinder progress and undermine an individual's potential. Human connection is fundamental to happiness and fulfillment and this shows how habits play a crucial role in shaping one's daily experiences, behaviours and outcomes across various domains of life. It is the habits that contribute to a sense of belonging, support networks and emotional fulfillment. They encompass a wide range of actions, from simple everyday tasks to complex behaviours and thus play a significant role in shaping lives. They are not mere trivialities but powerful forces that permeate every aspect of our lives. By intentionally cultivating positive habits and breaking free from detrimental ones, one can create a life that is aligned with our values, goals and aspirations. Whether they are positive or negative, habits are and will always be an integral part of one's life. They form a crucial part of the everyday conceptual scheme used to explain normal human activity. Remember, an individual only becomes what they think they can. One cannot change the habits one does daily. The secret of an individual's success is found in their daily routine as rightly said there are no overnight transformations.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Rationalise regulations for e-commerce



UTTAM GUPTA

When the Government expects foreign companies to do almost everything that a retailer does, how can it deny these firms the right to sell?

Way back in 2019, Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh (DVM) an organisation of retail traders in the national capital had lodged a complaint with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) alleging anti-competitive behaviour by Amazon Seller Services (ASS) and Flipkart Internet Private Limited (FIPL).

The CCI is an authority established under the Competition Act, of 2002. The Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates mergers, amalgamations acquisitions etc to ensure that there is no adverse effect on competition. Amazon and Flipkart are global giants operating e-commerce marketplaces in India through their subsidiaries, the ASS and the FIPL.

DVM argued that ASS and FIPL had entered into exclusive sales agreements with smartphone makers to sell certain phones through a small number of preferred sellers. It also alleged that they had given preferential treatment to certain sellers by giving them higher search rankings and offering to pay for part of the discount that such sellers would offer during key sales periods such as Flipkart's Big Billion Days and Amazon's Prime Day.

On January 13, 2020, the CCI initiated an investigation under Section 26(1) of the Competition Act, 2002. Prima facie, the CCI agreed with DVM's contention and ordered a probe by the Director General (DG) - Investigation. ASS and FIPL approached the Karnataka High Court (KHC) with a plea to quash the CCI order. The KHC refused to quash it. The duo challenged the order in the Supreme Court (SC). In August 2021, the SC too dismissed their applications and ordered that "the CCI - DG will complete the probe.

Now, the CCI-DG has come up with its findings.

The investigation has charged Amazon and Flipkart with violation of antitrust laws. Leveraging their substantial financial resources, they have indulged in 'predatory pricing' and forged exclusive partnerships with selective sellers. Predatory pricing is the illegal business practice of setting prices extremely low albeit by offering heavy discounts to consumers in an attempt to eliminate the competition and establish a monopoly. This has resulted in the shutdown of thousands of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

It has specifically targeted Amazon for certain practices, especially with Cloutail India Pvt Ltd (a firm set up by a JV namely Prione Business Services (PBS) established by Amazon, in collaboration with an Indian entity owned by Narayan Murthy of Infosys) a "preferred" seller on Amazon's marketplace and other in-house sellers. Similarly, Flipkart has been investigated for its links to platform sellers, which contravenes new e-commerce regulations.

What has led to the violations? This can't be attributed solely to the use of financial muscle by these companies as alluded to by the CCI - DG. This has a lot to do with the rules introduced in early 2016, through which the Government allowed 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) under the so-called e-commerce marketplace model.



THE GOVERNMENT IS ALSO WORKING ON A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON FDI IN E-COMMERCE. IF IT GOES AHEAD WITH SUCH A POLICY, IT WILL BE TANTAMOUNT TO A RETROSPECTIVE CHANGE OF POLICY AND SEND A WRONG SIGNAL TO FOREIGN INVESTORS

The marketplace is a platform where vendors sell their products directly to consumers even as its owner (read: Amazon/Flipkart) merely acts as a facilitator by providing services such as booking orders, raising invoices, arranging delivery, accepting rejections etc. She can't hold inventory or undertake direct selling. The policy intent was abundantly clear. The foreign investor in the marketplace wasn't supposed to invest in the inventory model.

However, the intent wasn't reflected in the Press Note (PN) issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in the Ministry of Commerce and Industries. While drafting the fine print, a clever bureaucrat blurred the demarcation between the marketplace where 100 per cent FDI was allowed and the inventory model where it wasn't. The PN (2016) prescribed two conditions. First, the foreign entity owning marketplace cannot permit more than 25 per cent of total sales on the marketplace from one vendor or its group companies. Two, it cannot directly or indirectly influence the sale price.

In the absence of specifying who that vendor should be, it made way for a company linked to the owner of the marketplace to get in. The latter could set up four companies (call them subsidiaries or JVs) and control 25 per cent of each of the total sales on the platform. Contrary to the policy intent, which prohibited foreign investors from direct selling, the fine print did just the opposite. Having allowed its entities to control almost all of the sales made on the marketplace, it

would be naive to expect that an anti-competition situation won't emerge. With such rules in place, it was a foregone conclusion that Amazon et al would have exclusive partnerships with selective sellers who - acting in concert with the former - would indulge in predatory pricing and give heavy discounts leading to the annihilation of thousands of SMEs. Following a complaint from the SMEs, on December 26, 2018, the DPIIT clarified that "the owner of the marketplace or its subsidiary or its joint venture (JV) with an Indian company can't have ownership of the seller." Further, "a seller on the platform can't source more than 25 percent of its inventory from a firm connected with the latter."

Foreign investors can circumvent the first rider by having less than 50 per cent shareholding in the seller firm and arguing that they have no control (majority) over the latter. The marketplace owner can also sell his own product - albeit through its wholesale arm - on the platform. All that the wholesale arm needs to ensure is to restrict supplies to the seller within the 25 per cent threshold.

The clarification/modification in the conditions through December 26, 2018, hasn't helped much in improving the situation.

A few sellers, some of them still maintaining connection with the marketplace owner continue to dominate the e-commerce platform. For instance, only three dozen firms out of the 400,000 sellers on the ASS platform account for 67 per cent of sales on it. Meanwhile, in 2020, the Department of Consumer Affairs

(DCA), in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, issued the Consumer Protection (e-commerce) Rules, under Section 101 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The rules bar affiliated entities from selling on e-commerce platforms, restrict 'flash sales', and disallow sellers from using the name or brand associated with the marketplace e-commerce entities for the promotion of goods. In 2021, DCA made amendments to restrict business-to-business, or B2B, sales in e-commerce and a provision to prevent an 'abuse of dominant position' by e-commerce firms.

The Government is also working on a comprehensive policy on FDI in e-commerce that will give primacy to the above rules. If it goes ahead with such a policy, it will be tantamount to a retrospective change of policy and send a wrong signal to foreign investors. The present mess owes it to the very idea of the marketplace which is flawed. When, the Government expects foreign companies to do almost everything that a retailer does viz. booking orders, raising the invoices, arranging the delivery, accepting rejections and so on, how can the former deny the latter right to sell? The way forward is to shun this idea; instead, allow 100 per cent FDI in retail. The bureaucrats had already done it but in a 'subtle' way. The Government should make it obvious and straightforward. Moreover, 100 per cent FDI should be permitted to all retailers, online or offline, big or small for a level playing field.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Empowering rural women through the 'Umeed' scheme

Despite its success in empowering many women, this scheme's benefits are still not fully accessible to all in the region

In remote villages of Jammu and Kashmir, a silent revolution is underway as these regions are witnessing women coming out of their houses to explore the avenues of self-employment through the 'Umeed Scheme' - Jammu and Kashmir State Rural Livelihood Mission (JKRLM). This transformative initiative aims to reach out to 66% of the rural population across the erstwhile 125 blocks, linking them to sustainable livelihood opportunities and nurturing them till they come out of poverty and enjoy a decent quality of life.

In December last year, Mission Director JKRLM, Indu Kanwal Chib, while sharing the JKRLM Vision



MANIMA AKHTAR

2024-30 informed that JKRLM has successfully federated 725,000 women and formed 87,000 self-help groups (SHGs) across the Union Territory of J&K. These SHGs are working in various areas such as livelihood, financial inclusion, gender and social inclusion and other related fields. However, certain rural pockets remain unaware of this significant scheme, lacking

comprehensive knowledge to capitalise on its benefits. One such area is Baila village in Mandi Tehsil of the border district Poonch, which is located approximately 230 kilometres from Jammu city. Although the scheme has been operational in the nearby Mandi tehsil since 2016, its reach in Baila village remains limited. When asked about the 'Umeed Scheme', the response from the women of this remote village was a unanimous lack of awareness. When they were informed about the benefits of the scheme, they expressed eagerness to understand its workings, underscoring its importance for including women in the workforce and towards their economic freedom.

In this context, Matina Akhtar, an 18-year-old resident of Baila, shared her perspective: "Despite living just two kilometres away from Mandi, we remain unaware of this scheme. There is this wide gap between secluded corners of our country and the development schemes. This gap leaves us, women from remote areas, bereft of its advantages. We only learn about it when the scheme is on the verge of closure. Our remoteness is the reason why we haven't received any information about this scheme. How are we supposed to engage with it if we're in the dark?" "When I needed funds for my grocery store, I was short on cash. So, I resorted to



selling some wood from my house to procure materials. Had I known about this scheme earlier, I wouldn't have sold those timbers," lamented 37-year-old Farida Akhtar from the same village. When asked "If they have awareness about any

scheme?" resident Zareena Akhtar, aged 23, responded that within their community, the only scheme recognised is the Anganwadi Scheme (ICDS), highlighting a significant gap in knowledge and accessibility to Governmental initiatives beyond this singular program.

There is also a lot of fear among the people of the village as well - both women and men. They have the fear of failure - what if they will not succeed in their endeavour? Salma Akhtar, 19, from Baila, confirms the notion. She expressed fears about potential repercussions and uncertainties associated with loan acquisition under the scheme. There is a need to dispel the

apprehensions lingering in the hearts of these women and endeavour to convey to them that this scheme is not a threat, but rather a boon. They need to be assured that this initiative can usher positive transformations into their lives. They must be made aware that this scheme is tailored specifically for women and designed to work towards their financial freedom.

According to Naima Akhtar, the Cluster Head of the Umeed Scheme in Mandi Tehsil, the Government has allocated decent funding under this scheme for women to benefit from it. "I urge other women who may be unaware of this scheme to join us. Numerous individuals, both men and women,

in the Mandi Loren area have secured rewarding opportunities through this Scheme. They are sustaining their households without needing to engage in manual labor.

Regrettably, the women of Baila remain oblivious to this exceptional program. Meanwhile, women from other regions are harnessing its benefits, propelling themselves up the ladder of progress. They are not only achieving financial independence but also cultivating self-reliance. This brings hope for a transformative change in the lives of the women of Baila.

(The author is grassroots writer from Poonch, J&K; views are personal. Charkha Features)

Israel reopens Gaza crossing post-rocket attack

UN says no aid allowed across

AP ■ JERUSALEM/CHICAGO

The Israeli military said on Wednesday that it has reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza, a key terminal for the entry of humanitarian aid that was closed over the weekend after a Hamas rocket attack killed four Israeli soldiers nearby. But the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said no aid has yet entered and there is no one to receive it on the Palestinian side. Workers fled during an incursion by an Israeli tank brigade on Tuesday that captured the nearby Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which remains closed. That limited incursion did not appear to be the start of the full-scale invasion of Rafah that Israel has repeatedly promised. But the prolonged closure of the two main crossings could exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where the UN says a "full-blown famine" is already underway in the north. The United States paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching

a decision on launching a full-scale assault on Rafah, in a further widening of divisions between the two close allies. The US says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled fighting elsewhere. Israel says Rafah is Hamas' last stronghold and that a wider offensive there is needed to dismantle the group's military and governing capabilities. The US, Egypt and Qatar are meanwhile ramping up efforts to close the gaps in a possible agreement for at least a temporary cease-fire and the release of some of the scores of Israeli hostages still held by Hamas. Israel has linked the threatened Rafah operation to the fate of those negotiations. The Rafah crossing has been a vital conduit for humanitarian aid since the start of the war and is the only place where people can enter and exit. Kerem Shalom is Gaza's main cargo terminal. Israel now controls all of Gaza's crossings for the first time since it withdrew troops and settlers from the territory nearly two decades ago, though it has maintained a blockade with Egypt's cooperation for most of that time. Associated Press journalists heard sporadic explosions and gunfire in the area of the Rafah crossing overnight, including two large blasts early

Wednesday. The Israeli military reported six launches from Rafah toward the Kerem Shalom crossing on Tuesday. COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, said the Kerem Shalom crossing reopened early Wednesday. But Juliette Touma, the director of communications for UNRWA, said no aid had entered as of midday on Wednesday and that the UN agency had been forced to ration fuel, which is imported through Rafah. Gaza's Health Ministry meanwhile said at least 46 patients and wounded people who had been scheduled to leave Tuesday for medical treatment have been left stranded. UN agencies and aid groups have ramped up humanitarian assistance in recent weeks as Israel has lifted some restrictions and opened an additional crossing in the north under pressure from the United States, its closest ally. But aid workers say the closure of Rafah, which is the only gateway for the entry of fuel for trucks and generators, could have severe repercussions, and the UN says northern Gaza is already in a state of "full-blown famine". COGAT said 60 aid trucks entered through the northern crossing on Tuesday. Some 500 trucks entered Gaza every day before the war.

The war began when Hamas militants breached Israel's defences on October 7 and swept through nearby army bases and farming communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Hamas is still believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others after most of the rest were released during a November cease-fire. The war has killed over 34,700 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and has driven some 80 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes. Israel's military campaign has been one of the deadliest and most destructive in recent history, reducing large parts of Gaza to rubble. Biden has repeatedly warned Netanyahu against launching an invasion of Rafah. But Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to bring down his government if he calls off an offensive or makes too many concessions in the cease-fire talks. The US has historically provided Israel enormous amounts of military aid, which has only accelerated since the start of the war. The paused shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 smaller ones, with the US

concern focused on how the larger bombs could be used in a dense urban setting, a US official said on Tuesday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The official said no final decision had been made yet on proceeding with the shipment. Meanwhile Police began to clear a Pro-Palestinian tent encampment at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., early Wednesday, hours after dozens of protesters left the site and marched to President Ellen Granberg's home. "Officers gave their third and final warning to demonstrators to move at about 3:30 a.m., saying all who remained in U-Yard and the stretch of H Street in front of the plaza would be arrested," according to GW Hatchet, the university's independent student-run newspaper. University officials had warned in statements of possible suspensions for students engaging in protest activities on University Yard. "While the university is committed to protecting students' rights to free expression, the encampment had evolved into an unlawful activity, with participants in direct violation of multiple university policies and city regulations," the university said in a statement.

US halts bomb shipment to Israel amid Rafah invasion concerns

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching a decision on launching a full-scale assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah against the wishes of the US, a senior administration official said on Tuesday. The shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 500-pound (225-kilogram) bombs, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter, with the focus of US concern being the larger explosives and how they could be used in a dense urban setting. More than 1 million civilians are sheltering in Rafah after evacuating other parts of Gaza amid Israel's war on Hamas, which came after the militant group's deadly attack on Israel on October 7. The US has historically provided enormous amounts of military aid to Israel. That has only accelerated in the aftermath of Hamas' October 7 attack that killed some 1,200 in Israel and led to about 250 being taken captive by militants. The pausing of the aid shipment is the most striking manifestation of the growing daylight between Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and the administration of President Joe Biden, which has called on Israel to do far more to protect the lives of innocent civilians in Gaza. It also comes as the Biden administration is due to deliver a first-of-its-kind formal verdict this week on whether the airstrikes on Gaza and restrictions on delivery of aid have violated international and US laws designed to spare civilians from the worst horrors of war. A decision against Israel would further add to pressure on Biden to curb the flow of weapons and money to Israel's military. Biden's administration in April began reviewing future trans-

fers of military assistance as Netanyahu's government appeared to move closer toward an invasion of Rafah, despite months of opposition from the White House. The official said the decision to pause the shipment was made last week and no final decision had been made yet on whether to proceed with the shipment to a later date. US officials had declined for days to comment on the halted transfer, word of which came as Biden on Tuesday described US support for Israel as "ironclad, even when we disagree". Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to square the arms holdup with Biden's rhetoric in support of Israel, saying only, "Two things could be true." Israeli troops on Tuesday seized control of Gaza's vital Rafah border crossing in what the White House described as a limited operation that stopped short of the full-on Israeli invasion of the city that Biden has repeatedly warned against on humanitarian grounds, most recently in a Monday call with Netanyahu. Israel has ordered the evacuation of 100,000 Palestinians from the city. Israeli forces have also carried out what it describes as "targeted strikes" on the eastern part of Rafah and captured the Rafah crossing, a critical conduit for the flow of humanitarian aid along the Gaza-Egypt border. Privately, concern has mounted inside the White House about what's unfolding in Rafah, but publicly administration officials have stressed that they did not think the operations had defied Biden's warnings against a widescale operation in the city. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Israel described the operation along the Gaza-Egypt border in eastern Rafah as "an operation of limited scale and duration" aimed at cutting off Hamas arms smuggling, but also said the US would monitor the fighting.

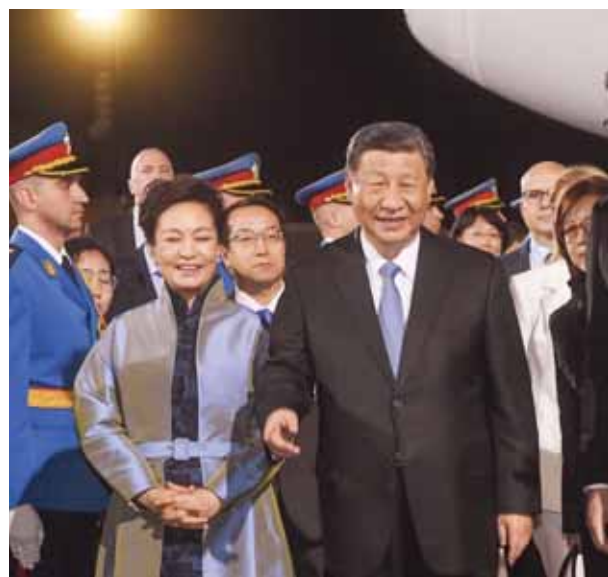
Another German politician attacked

Berlin (AP): A prominent Berlin politician was violently assaulted and suffered injuries to her head and neck, police said Wednesday, in the latest attack on elected officials that raises concern over rising political violence in Germany. Franziska Giffey, the city's top economic official, a former mayor and an ex-federal minister, was attacked at an event in a Berlin library on Tuesday by a man who approached her from behind and hit her with a bag containing a hard device, police said. Giffey was taken to a hospital and treated for head and neck pain, police said. A 74-year-old man was detained and police searched his home, police said. They said the suspect was known to police, but did not give any indication for a motive.

China, Serbia sign pact to build 'shared future'

AP ■ BELGRADE

China and European Union candidate Serbia signed an agreement on Wednesday to build a "shared future," making the Balkan country the first in Europe to agree on such a document with Beijing. After meeting in Belgrade, Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Serbian President Vucic announced they would "deepen and elevate the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Serbia," and "build a new era of a community with a shared future between China and Serbia." Xi launched the term "community for shared future" over 10 years ago. While it may not denote a specific initiative, experts believe it has an underlying significance as another term for an alliance. "Eight years ago, Serbia became China's first comprehensive strategic partner in the Central and Eastern European region, and today Serbia is the first European country to build a community of destiny with China, fully reflecting the



In this photo provided by the Serbian Presidential Press Service, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, right, welcomes Chinese President Xi Jinping, center, and his wife Peng Liyuan during a welcome ceremony upon his arrival at the Nikola Tesla airport in Belgrade, Serbia, Tuesday. AP/PTI

strategic, special and high level of China-Serbia relations." Xi said during a press conference after signing the agreement. It was not immediately clear

how the EU would respond to Serbia getting even closer to China. Russia's war on Ukraine has pushed the integration of six Western Balkan countries, including Serbia, into the EU at the top of the 27-nation bloc's agenda. China has claimed neutrality in the Ukraine conflict, but has refused to call the Russian assault an invasion and has been accused of bolstering Russia's military capacity. Serbia has condemned the Russian invasion but has refused to join international sanctions against Moscow. Xi arrived in Serbia to a warm welcome on Tuesday evening from France, where he had a high-stakes state visit dominated by trade disputes and Russia's war in Ukraine. Thousands of people chanting "China-Serbia" and waving flags were bused in from across Serbia to attend a welcoming ceremony for Xi on Wednesday in front of the Serbia Palace, in the new part of Belgrade where the talks were held. Serbia's populist president addressed the crowd from a balcony, calling Xi an "iron-clad" friend. He said his visit to Serbia was "historic" because it opened the path for even closer ties.

"We are writing history today although it doesn't seem so to many," Vucic said. "We thank President Xi. He hasn't come to Europe in five years and he has again chosen our little Serbia." At the start of the official meeting on Wednesday, Xi said "we are first-hand witnesses that the Serbian people view Chinese people as iron-clad best friends." "This is truly a two-sided and truthful friendship ... I truly hail this and it really made an extremely deep impression on me," Xi said, according to the state RTS television. Xi is travelling to Hungary later on Wednesday. Like Serbia, Hungary is seen as one of China's more friendly partners in Europe. Signs of pro-China sentiments were visible throughout the Serbian capital. A huge Chinese flag was placed on a skyscraper along a roadway leading into the city from the airport. Smaller Chinese and Serbian flags could be seen downtown and along a highway.

UK PM loses MP amid charge of 'incompetence'

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday suffered a humiliating defection from his party benches as a Conservative member of Parliament walked across the floor of the House of Commons to join the Opposition Labour ranks. Natalie Elphicke, MP for Dover, said the Tories under Sunak "have become a byword for incompetence and division" in a resignation statement just moments before the weekly Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs). The 43-year-old British Indian leader went on to face off with Labour Leader Keir Starmer, who made the most of the shock move which marks the second defection from the Tories to Labour in two weeks

and comes on the back of bruising local election results for the governing party. "When I was elected in 2019, the Conservative Party occupied the centre ground of British politics. The party was about building the future and making the most of the opportunities that lay ahead for our country," Elphicke, a staunch critic of the Labour Party until only a few days ago, said in her resignation letter. "Since then, many things have changed. The elected prime minister was ousted in a coup led by the unelected Rishi Sunak. Under Rishi Sunak, the Conservatives have become a byword for incompetence and division. The centre ground has been abandoned and key pledges of the 2019 manifesto have been ditched," she said. She added that the Labour

Party under Starmer has "changed out of all recognition" and its policies "can be trusted". "We need to move on from the broken promises of Rishi Sunak's tired and chaotic government," she declared. The dramatic moment of her crossing the floor of the House was followed by Starmer asking Sunak: "What is the point of this failed government staggering on" when the Tory MP on the front line of the small boats migration crisis on the coastline of Dover has openly attacked Sunak's handling of a priority issue like illegal migration. "If he thinks his own MPs joining the Labour Party are wrong if he thinks anyone believes any of the nonsense that he spouts, why doesn't he put it to the test and call a general election," questioned Starmer, in a series of stinging attacks during PMQs.

Glory to HK protest song banned after court overturns ruling

AP ■ HONG KONG

An appeals court on Wednesday granted the Hong Kong government's request to ban a popular protest song, overturning an earlier ruling and deepening concerns over the erosion of freedoms in the once-free-wheeling global financial hub. "Glory to Hong Kong" was often sung by demonstrators during huge anti-government protests in 2019. The song was later mistakenly played as the city's anthem at international sporting events, instead of China's "March of the Volunteers," in mix-ups that upset city officials. It was the first time a song has been banned in the city since Britain handed the territory back to Chinese rule in 1997. Critics have said prohibiting broadcast or distribution of the song further reduces freedom of expression since Beijing launched a crackdown in Hong

Kong following the 2019 protests. They have also warned the ban might disrupt the operation of tech giants and hurt the city's appeal as a business center. Judge Jeremy Poon wrote that the composer intended for the song to be a "weapon," pointing to its power in arousing emotions among some residents of the city. "We accept the assessment of the executive that prosecutions alone are clearly not adequate to tackle the acute criminal problems and that there is a compelling need for an injunction," he said. He said the injunction was necessary to persuade internet platform operators to remove "problematic videos in connection with the song" from their platforms. The operators have indicated they are ready to accede to the government's request if there is a court order, he added. The ban would target anyone who broadcast or distributed the song to advocate for the separation of Hong

Kong from China. It would also prohibit any actions that misrepresent the song as the national anthem with the intent to insult the anthem. The song can still be played if it is for lawful journalistic and academic activities. Failure to comply with the court order may be considered as contempt of court and could be liable for a fine or imprisonment. Authorities have previously arrested some residents who played the song in public under other offenses, such as playing a musical instrument in public without a permit, local media reported. As of mid-afternoon on Wednesday, "Glory to Hong Kong," whose artist is credited as "Thomas and the Hong Kong people," was still available on Spotify and Apple Music in both English and Cantonese. A search on YouTube for the song also displayed multiple videos and renditions. Google said in an email to the AP that it was "reviewing the

court's judgment." Spotify and Apple did not immediately comment. George Chen, co-chair of digital practice at The Asia Group, a Washington-headquartered business and policy consultancy, said it would be most practical for tech companies to restrict access to the content in question in a certain region to comply with the order. Chen called on the government to consider how to ease public concerns over the order's chilling effect on free speech. He said he hoped such bans will not become "the new normal" and establish a precedent. "This will get people really worried about how free Hong Kong's internet will be like tomorrow," he said. Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law in 2020 to quell the months-long unrest. That law was used to arrest many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists. In March, the city enacted a home-grown securi-

ty law, deepening fears that the city's Western-style civil liberties would be further curtailed. The two laws typically target more serious criminal acts. After the judgement was handed down, Lin Jian, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry, said stopping anyone from using the song to incite division and insult the national anthem is a necessary measure for the city to maintain national security. Hong Kong's Secretary for Justice Paul Lam insisted the injunction was not aimed at restricting the normal operation of internet service providers. He said the government would do its best to preserve the city's free flow of information. Lam argued that the acts covered by the ban could be constituted as criminal offenses even before the court order, and that the scope of the injunction was "extremely narrow."

Biden visits Wisconsin to tout Microsoft facility, meet voters & subtly troll Trump

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is racing into yet another battleground state Wednesday, continuing to push a contrast with Donald Trump on economic policy as his own reelection campaign readies a new USD 14 million advertising blitz aimed in part at Black, Latino and Asian American voters. Biden is traveling to Racine, Wisconsin, where he'll highlight a decision by Microsoft to build a USD 3.3 billion data center that is expected to create roughly 2,000 jobs. It's also the same spot where Trump, to much fanfare, lauded a plan by Taiwan-based electronics giant Foxconn plan to build a USD 10 billion manufacturing facility that was supposed to eventually employ 10,000 people. Except it was never completed. Conscious of that history, Microsoft's president Brad Smith said in an interview



with The Associated Press that Microsoft had a "steadfast commitment to under-promising and over-delivering" and praised the Biden administration and Democratic Gov. Tony Evers for economic policies that set the stage for the developments announced Wednesday. Trump's campaign didn't address Foxconn, but the former president often says the economy was in a much better position when he was in

office, and it will be again should he win. Meanwhile, Biden's reelection team is sharpening their outreach to minority voters on the airwaves, with the fresh, seven-figure digital and television ad campaign launching Wednesday that follows the USD 30 million effort that began after his State of the Union address in early March. One of the ads that is a part of the fresh campaign will also be released Wednesday and focuses on Trump's failed yet determined push to repeal the Affordable Care Act. After his speech, Biden is making a campaign stop to speak with Black voters about the stakes of the November election. The Biden campaign wants to capitalize on the fundraising advantage it's enjoyed over Trump, hoping to bury them on the airwaves while amassing significant resources on the ground in key battleground

states to force Republicans to play catch-up much later in the year. "Equally important as our own historic investments is the complete lack of investment on the other side," Michael Tyler, the Biden campaign's communications director, told reporters. "Trump's paid media strategy can only be described as anemic and inefficient." A significant portion of the USD 14 million campaign starting Wednesday will go into Black and Hispanic media, as well as Asian American print and radio, according to the campaign. Campaign officials also said Biden will continue to do targeted interviews with media that serve primarily minority audiences, while the campaign plans to launch more coalition groups in May that focus on specific blocs of voters. So far, the Biden campaign has started groups to engage women, Latinos and educators.

Dali crew to stay onboard during demolition to remove fallen bridge from ship's deck

AP ■ BALTIMORE

The crew of the Dali will remain on board the grounded container ship while demolition crews use explosives to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, officials said Tuesday. Of the crew members, 20 are from India and one is Sri Lankan. The steel span landed on the ship's bow after the Dali lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's support columns on March 26. Since then, the ship has been stuck amid the wreckage, and Baltimore's busy port has been closed to most maritime traffic. The controlled demolition, which is expected to take place in the coming days, will allow the Dali to be refloated and guided back into the Port of Baltimore, officials say. Once the ship is removed, maritime traffic can begin returning to normal, which will provide relief for thousands of longshoremen, truckers and small business owners who have seen their jobs impacted by the closure. Officials previously said they hoped to remove the Dali by May 10 and reopen the port's 50-foot (15.2-meter) main

channel by the end of May. The Dali's 21-member crew will shelter in place aboard the ship while the explosives are detonated, said Petty Officer Ronald Hodges of the Coast Guard. Engineers have been working for weeks to determine the best way to remove this last major piece of the fallen bridge. The explosives will send it tumbling into the water. Then a massive hydraulic grabber will lift the resulting sections of steel onto barges. Video footage released by Coast Guard officials last week showed entire sections of roadway sitting on the ship's deck. Hodges said the crew's safety was a top concern as officials considered whether they should remain on the ship during the demolition. He said engineers are using precision cuts to control how the trusses break down. "The last thing anybody wants is for something to happen to the crew members," Hodges said. They haven't been allowed to leave the Dali since the disaster. Officials said they've been busy maintaining the ship and assisting investigators.

A spokesperson for the crew didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment Tuesday afternoon. The National Transportation Safety Board and the FBI are conducting investigations into the bridge collapse. Danish shipping giant Maersk had chartered the Dali for a planned trip from Baltimore to Sri Lanka, but the ship didn't get far. Its crew sent a mayday call saying they had lost power and had no control of the steering system. Minutes later, the ship rammed into the bridge. Officials have said the safety board investigation will focus on the ship's electrical system, including whether it experienced power issues before leaving Baltimore. Six construction workers were killed in the collapse. Five bodies have been recovered from the water, but one remains missing. All the victims were Latino immigrants who were working an overnight shift filling potholes on the bridge. Police officers were able to stop traffic moments before the collapse, but they didn't have enough time to alert the workers. Maryland leaders said last week that they plan to rebuild the bridge by fall 2028.

Albanese dismisses China's claim blaming Aus for aircraft encounter

AP ■ MELBOURNE

China's account blaming Australia for a dangerous clash between their military aircraft in international airspace over the Yellow Sea failed to undermine Australian objections, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Wednesday.



In this undated photo provided by the Australian Defence Force, a Seahawk helicopter prepares to take off from the deck of HMAS Hobart during flying operations while on a regional presence deployment off northern Australia.

struck by a flare. Australia publicly accused China of unprofessional and unacceptable behavior, while China retorted that the Seahawk deliberately flew close to China's airspace in a "provocative move."

Maldives minister says Chinese research ship's activity unrelated

AP ■ MALE

The Maldives government does not believe that a high-tech Chinese ship conducted any research related to the archipelagic nation despite docking in Male twice and skirting its territorial waters for three months before departing, a senior minister said on Wednesday.

unaware that the research vessel did anything related to us and I don't believe that they did," Shiyam told the news portal.

when Maldives' Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer left on his first official visit to India. Xiang Yang Hong 03, described as the most modern research vessel in the Chinese fleet, had begun its journey to the Maldives on January 14, barely 24 hours after President Mohamed Muizzu concluded his state visit to China.

Ex-Chinese defense min emerges after long absence

Beijing (PTI): China's former defence minister Gen. Wei Fenghe whose prolonged absence from the public view sparked speculation about his fate has resurfaced, suggesting that he was politically safe, a media report said on Wednesday.



French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and his wife Peng Liyuan watch folklore dancers on Tuesday at the Tourmalet pass, in the Pyrenees mountains.

Britain to expel Russian defense attaché over dangerous activities

AP ■ LONDON

Britain is expelling Russia's defense attaché after accusing him of being an undeclared military intelligence officer, one of several measures it is taking against Moscow for malicious activities, the government said Wednesday.

expect accusations of Russophobia, conspiracy theories and hysteria from the Russian government," Cleverly said in Parliament.

Poland detains Russian who illegally crossed from Belarus

Warsaw (Poland)(AP):

Poland's security officials said Wednesday that a 41-year-old man from Russia had been detained and was being questioned after illegally crossing in from Russia's ally Belarus.

with someone who was carrying out tasks for Russian (secret) services," Polish media reported the man was not armed and was in civilian clothes, but was carrying a written contract with the Russian army that included participation in actions being part of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine.

Taliban reject claims of Afghan involvement in recent attacks

Islamabad (AP):

The Taliban on Wednesday rejected claims of Afghan involvement in recent attacks in Pakistan, calling it "irresponsible and far from the reality."

'Split in JSP-N would not affect stability of Prachanda-led govt'

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson of the Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N) Upendra Yadav on Wednesday said that he will approach the court against the "unconstitutional move" to divide his party when he was abroad as he insisted that the split would not affect the stability of the coalition government.



gal and unconstitutional". He termed the move by Ashok Rai to form a new party namely, Janata Samajbadi Party, a "conspiracy hatched out of power hungry and egoistic attitude".

in the Madhesi party could jeopardize the survival of the government. "I talked to the Prime Minister and assured my party's continued support to the coalition government," said Yadav.

SL looks for USD 17 billion debt reduction from restructuring

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka is looking at a reduction of approximately USD 17 billion from its overall debt burden in the ongoing debt restructuring process, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said here on Wednesday.

declared its first-ever sovereign default since gaining independence from Britain in 1948. The unprecedented financial crisis led President Ranil Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to quit office in 2022.

manifest in various forms, including reductions in principal amounts, interest payments, or extended repayment timelines. Such restructuring efforts hold the potential to alleviate our debt burden by USD 17 billion," Sabry said.

investors linked to sovereign bonds aim to finalise this phase by June, with a targeted completion before June 2024," the Minister added.

Chinese warships docked in Cambodia for 5 months; not permanent, says govt

AP ■ PHNOM PENH

Cambodia's Defense Ministry insisted Wednesday that the months-long presence of two Chinese warships in a strategically important naval base that is being newly expanded with funding from Beijing does not constitute a permanent deployment of the Chinese military in the country.

lyzed by The Associated Press, confirm that the two ships remained there on Wednesday, more than five months since they initially appeared.

Cambodia is not allowing any foreign forces to be deployed on its territory," he said. "That won't happen; that point is in our Constitution and we are fully following it."

personnel, store weapons and berth warships. The base sits adjacent to the South China Sea, where China has aggressively asserted its claim to virtually the entire strategic waterway, and also provides easy access to the Malacca Straits, a critical shipping route leading from it to the Indian Ocean.

Russia launches attack on Ukrainian energy facilities

AP ■ KYIV

Russia launched aerial attacks on energy facilities throughout Ukraine early Wednesday, targeting seven regions with more than 50 missiles as well as drones, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.



Wednesday's attacks occurred on the day that Ukraine observes the end of European fighting in World War II. "Massive missile attack by Nazi Putin on the Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in the Second World War," Zelenskyy said.

Possibility of GDP growth touching 8 per cent in FY24 quite high: CEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Wednesday said there was a high possibility of GDP growth touching 8 per cent in FY24 on the back of robust growth registered during the three quarters of the financial year ended March 2024. India's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 8.4 per cent in the third quarter ended December 2023. In the second quarter, the GDP growth was 7.6 per cent while 7.8 per cent in the first quarter. "The IMF has projected a growth rate of 7.8 per cent for FY24. But if you look at the

trajectory of growth in the first three quarters, obviously, the possibility that the growth rate touches 8 per cent is quite high," he said at an event organised by NCAER here. This is higher than RBI's estimate of 7.5 per cent growth for the Indian economy in 2023-24. For the ongoing financial year, he said, the International Monetary Fund has an estimate of 6.8 per cent but the Reserve Bank of India expects a 7 per cent GDP growth for FY25. "If that materialises, of course, it will be the fourth consecutive year after COVID starting from FY22 that the economy will have grown at 7



per cent or more. The RBI forecasts of 7 per cent for FY25 turns out to be either correct or even underestimate, then it would be the fourth consecutive year of 7 or higher growth rate," he said. However, he said, a lot would depend on how the monsoon shapes up. Although the expectations are that there will be an above-normal monsoon, spatial and temporal distribution will matter. On the growth beyond FY25, he said, there is a possibility of India growing between 6.5-7 per cent because the key difference this decade compared to the last is the one

of balance sheet strength in the financial sector and the non-financial sector in the corporate sector as well. The investment made in supply-side augmentation of both physical and digital infrastructure has placed the economy to pursue non-inflationary growth, he said, adding that this also helps absorb the challenge of overheating. He also said that the household sector's net financial savings flows were lower in 2022-23 at 5.1 per cent due to the bulk of savings shifting to real sectors. Asked about the RBI's recent circular on under-construction infra project

financing, he said, this is draft guidelines and would not like to comment. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) last week proposed to lenders that they set aside higher provisions for under-construction infrastructure projects and asked them to ensure strict monitoring of any emerging stress. As per the draft norms, the RBI proposed that lenders set aside a provision of 5 per cent of the loan amount. This will be reduced to 2.5 per cent once a project is operational. Currently, lenders are required to have a provision of 0.4 per cent on project loans that are not overdue or stressed.

Sebi issues periodic reporting format for investment advisers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday came out with a standardised periodic reporting format for submission of information by investment advisers (IAs) pertaining to their activities, whereby they also need to disclose their social media handles. At present, the Investment Advisers Administration and Supervisory Body (IAASB) has been seeking reports from IAs on an ad-hoc basis. IAASB has been recognised by Sebi for the purpose of administration and supervision of investment advisers. Under the new format, investment advisers have to disclose details of their social media handles, bank accounts used for receiving advisory fee, NISM certification details, information about the last inspection carried out by Sebi or IAASB, details of advertisements issued during the half-year period and information on publishing of complaints against them, Sebi said in a circular. Investment advisers have been directed to submit



periodic reports for half-yearly periods ending on September 30 and March 31 of every financial year. Sebi said that IAs need to submit the periodic report for the half-year period ended on March 31, 2024, to IAASB within 15 days from the date of issuance of the circular by the supervisory body. For the subsequent half-yearly periods, IAs will be required to submit periodic reports within seven working days from the end of the half-yearly period. Last week, the Securities and

Exchange Board of India (Sebi) came out with a framework for the administration and supervision of research analysts and investment advisers, whereby a stock exchange can be authorised to oversee and manage such entities. Sebi stated a stock exchange should be granted recognition as RAASB (Research Analyst Administration and Supervisory Body) and IAASB (Investment Adviser Administration and Supervisory Body).

India playing very critical role in IT sector: CEO of cloud security firm

PTI ■ SANTA CLARA

India is playing a very critical role in the IT sector and Indians are helping the world find solutions to global problems, the CEO of a top American cloud security company has said. Jay Chaudhury, CEO and founder of San Jose-based Zscaler also said the Modi government is playing a very good role in creating a tech-friendly environment in India. "I think the Indian government, especially under (Narendra) Modi, is already playing a very good role (in creating a tech-friendly environment in India," Indian American technology entrepreneur Chaudhury told PTI in an interview on the sidelines of TIECon here last week. "In fact, when I started Zscaler, I opened my office in Bangalore for Zscaler before I opened the offices in Silicon Valley," he said. "Today about 40% of employees are in India. A lot of core development is done in Bangalore, Chandigarh, Pune, and Hyderabad. Brilliant people. You just have to work hard to find them.



Once you do, they do a great job, very cost-effective, very driven, very passionate," he said in response to a question. India is playing a very critical role in the IT sector and Indians, he said, are helping the world find solutions to global problems. "You go to any large high-tech company, it may be Zscaler or Microsoft or Google, Indians are in every level from software developments to managers, through directors to CEOs and the like," he said. "So, we are playing a very

important role. I'm very proud of it. That's because Indians come with a mathematical mindset. We have grades in schools. Some of the top schools are very good and people are hardworking. They're passionate because they want to get out there and make a difference," Chaudhury said. According to him, India is yet to catch up in the area of building software companies in India that can sell in every part of the world. "I think the IT sector that started with system integrators like Wipro and Infosys has done extremely well. The next phase is still early. There are lots of good opportunities. We're seeing investments going there. I think it's bound to happen, but it's still at an early stage," he said. "The lesson I think Indian entrepreneurs could take is that when they build these products, they need to keep the Western world in mind first. If you can be successful in selling in America and Europe, you can build a very large company. That's how Israel do it. Israel is doing an extremely good job in building software in Israel and selling that in

the rest of the world. That's the area where Indians can improve it," Chaudhury said. The first thing the Indian government should do is get out of the way of entrepreneurs. "We do that very well. There was a time when they used to be licensed raj, license for everything. It's by and large gone. I think India is helping set up collaborations. I see in the hardware area, whether it is Apple or it's Samsung, some of those high-tech companies are being set up. They create an ecosystem of companies that help learn and evolve the ecosystem. I think it's good," he said. "What we need to do overall, is probably provide a little bit of more mentorship for Indian companies. The Indian companies need to start leveraging some of the US connections to understand how to successfully sell software solutions you build in India for the entire world. "There's some work to be done. I don't think the government needs to do a whole lot more. I think organisations like TIE can play a big role and they're doing some good job in the area," he said.

Sterlite Tech posts ₹82 crore loss in Q4



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Broadband technology company Sterlite Technologies on Wednesday reported a consolidated loss of Rs 82 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024, mainly due to a dip in optical networking business. The company had posted a profit of Rs 63 crore a year ago. Its consolidated revenue from operations declined about 39 per cent to Rs 1,140 crore during the reported quarter from Rs 1,872 crore in the March 2023 quarter, according to a regulatory filing. "FY24 had its challenges, but we were resilient in actioning our priorities on customer, cost and cash. We see the market turning gradually, and early signs of this are visible in our customer discussions and order volumes," Sterlite Technologies (STL) Managing Director Ankit Agarwal said in a statement. For the fiscal ended March 31, 2024, STL posted a consolidated loss of Rs 57 crore, while it had reported a profit of Rs 127 crore in FY23. The optical networking business revenue of STL almost halved to Rs 777 crore during the reported quarter from Rs 1,505 crore in the March 2023 quarter. The annual revenue from the optical networking business also declined by about 30 per cent to Rs 3,830 crore from Rs 5,439 crore a year ago. The annual profit of STL declined by about 21 per cent to Rs 5,478 crore during the reported year from Rs 6,925 crore in FY23. "AI is bringing renewed excitement into the fibre space. We see 5G, fibre to the home, and data centre build-outs as the holy trinity of fibre for the years to come," Agarwal said.

Domestic automobile retail sales surge 27 per cent in April: FADA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Passenger vehicle retail sales in India rose 27 per cent year-on-year to 22,06,070 units in April as all segments, including passenger vehicles and two-wheelers, witnessed growth, industry body FADA said on Wednesday. The overall vehicle registrations stood at 17,40,649 units in April 2023. Passenger vehicle retail sales rose 16 per cent to 3,35,123 units last month as compared to 2,89,056 units in the same month last year. Similarly, two-wheeler registrations increased 33 per cent to 16,43,510 units in April against 12,33,763 units in the same month last year. Commercial vehicle retail witnessed a 2 per cent year-on-year jump to 90,707 units in April. Three-wheeler sales rose 9 per



cent year-on-year to 80,105 units while tractors witnessed growth of 1 per cent at 56,625 units in April. "While some attribute this growth to the shift in Navratri to April instead of March last year, the overall increase was significant," the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) President Manish Raj Singhania said.

The passenger vehicle category experienced double-digit YoY growth, supported by enhanced model availability and favourable market sentiments, particularly around festive events like Navratri and Gudi Padwa, he noted. "Despite strong bookings and customer flow, high competition, excess supply and discounting presented challenges for sustained growth. Additionally, the lack of new models in some portfolios impacted market traction," Singhania said. The two-wheeler segment saw notable growth due to improved supply and the increasing demand for 125cc models, he said. Positive market sentiments, bolstered by stable fuel prices, a favourable monsoon outlook, festive demand and the marriage season, contributed to the increase in

sales, Singhania said. In the commercial vehicle segment elections dampened sentiment with customers delaying expansion plans, he said. Limited finance options and regional challenges such as water scarcity further impacted performance, he added. Singhania noted that the domestic auto industry remains cautiously optimistic about its near-term outlook. "Market opportunities exist with rising customer interest in new models. However, election-related uncertainty and financial constraints remain key challenges that the industry will need to monitor closely to navigate this evolving landscape effectively," he added. FADA said it collated vehicle retail data from 1,360 out of 1,503 RTOs across the country.

Polaris gets new ₹2,246 crore smart metering project

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Energy solutions provider Polaris on Wednesday said it has secured a contract worth Rs 2,246 crore to install 2.2 million smart meters in West Bengal. "With this order, Polaris has successfully closed orders over Rs 7,700 crore across the geographies of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Manipur, Bihar and Ladakh," the company said in a statement. The new order worth Rs 2,246 crore in West Bengal is for installation of 2.2 million smart meters in the state. Polaris Smart Metering will supply, commission, install and maintain smart meters for consumers and system metering across the consumer base in these important clusters for the next 10 years. These smart meters will be equipped with state-of-the-art technology, enabling prepaid billing, real-time energy monitoring,



accurate metering, and improved grid management capabilities. This contract comes under a Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Own-Transfer (DBFOOT) agreement. In addition to West Bengal, Polaris has also secured a contract of Rs 206 crore for smart meter installation in Manipur in the region of Imphal to install over 1.6 lakh smart meters. In January, the company had secured Rs 5,200 crore

contract for smart meter installation in Uttar Pradesh to install over 5.1 million smart meters. The primary objective of these projects is to reduce losses for discoms and to empower consumers by introducing smart prepaid meters, enabling them to have better control over their energy consumption. Jaipur-based Polaris is into manufacturing and implementation of smart metering projects.

Graduates of School of Planning recruited as Assistant Town Planners in PMIDC and HPSC

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

As many as fifteen students of Guru Ramdas School of Planning, GNDU, Amritsar are selected as Assistant Town Planners in Punjab Municipal Infrastructure Development Corporation, Chandigarh and Haryana Public Service Commission, Panchkula. Professor Ashwani Luthra, Head of the Department, said its Under-graduates and Post-graduates are high in the North-Western region of India, though they are eligible for Class-I posts in other States as well. The Department offers specialised UG and PG level programmes. Its Five Years Integrated M Tech (Urban and Regional Planning) is a special

feature, which provides option to the students to exit after 4 years and get B.Tech. (Urban and Regional Planning) degree. The other programmes are 2 years MTech (Urban Planning), MTech (Infrastructure Planning), MTech (Transport Planning). Admission for all the programmes is starting from 8th May, 2024 by submitting admission forms online on the University website. Professor Luthra said the graduates of the department are eligible for the class I gazetted posts in the Town and Country Planning Departments, Municipal Corporations, Improvement Trusts, and many other public and private sector firms in different parts of India.

NIFTEM K aims to become like IITs and MIT



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dr Harinder Singh Oberoi, Director, NIFTEM-K, expressed during the inaugural ceremony of the annual carnival named Edesia the institute's dedication to excellence in food technology, education, and research. He articulated the goal of elevating NIFTEM to an educational hub comparable to top prestigious institutions.

Google launches Google Wallet for Android users in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tech titan Google on Wednesday launched the Google Wallet app for Android users in India, allowing them to securely store essentials like boarding passes, loyalty cards, event tickets, and public transport passes. The digital wallet, which becomes operational in India from Wednesday, comes as a complementary service to existing payment app Google Pay, a top official said. "Google Pay is not going anywhere, it will remain our primary payment app, Google Wallet is specifically tailored for non-payment use cases," Ram Papatla, GM and India Engineering Lead, Android at Google, said.

He said the idea behind the service was "to create an open service where carriers, OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), and developers can build amazing products". For the new service, Google has partnered with 20 Indian brands in the likes of Air India, IndiGo, Flipkart, Pine Labs, Kochi Metro, PVR and INOX, and said more partners would be onboarded in the months to come. Google Wallet will allow users to save movie/event tickets, access boarding passes, store metro tickets, store office/corporate badges, and digitise physical documents. "Google Wallet offers users a single, organised location for fast, secure access to everyday

essentials like boarding passes, loyalty cards, event tickets, public transport passes, gift cards, and more," Google said in a statement. Papatla further said the tech giant will surely ideate in future on building an all-in-one app that allows both payment and non-payment use cases. He said the company's top priority currently is value and engagement creation, onboarding partners, and gaining trust. "Google Wallet is built on the foundation of security and privacy," he said, adding that Google remains committed to its "promise of providing openness, choice, and safety". Google Wallet is currently operational in about 80 countries.

Career with high placement avenues in urban, regional planning

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

Towns and villages are facing numerous problems and challenges related to housing, tariffs and transportation, water supply, sewerage, electricity, and many other social infrastructure. A qualified planner having specialisation in urban, regional, transportation, and infrastructure disciplines contributes quite significantly for the planned development of cities, regions, and villages. Guru Ramdas School of Planning at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar is a premier institute of spatial planning in North India since 1972. Professor Ashwani Luthra, Head said till date the department has played a

prominent role in contributing to the planned development of cities, regions, and villages. Currently, the department offers four specialised programmes, i.e., MTech (Urban Planning), MTech (Infrastructure Planning), MTech (Transport Planning), and B.Tech (Urban and Regional Planning). The graduates of the department are eligible for the Class I gazetted posts in the Town and Country Planning Departments, Municipal Corporations, Improvement Trusts, and many other public and private sector firms in different part of India. The graduates of the Department are also eligible for public and private sector jobs in countries like USA, Canada, Australia, Europe, etc.

Dortmund beats PSG 1-0 to reach Champions League final

Mbappe cannot pull off comeback

AP ■ PARIS

When Borussia Dortmund's players rushed over to their fans wearing yellow "London 24" T-shirts and joined in the celebrations after knocking out Paris Saint-Germain to reach the Champions League final on Tuesday, Mbappé had long left the field.

Wembley Stadium on June 1 is the final stop on Dortmund's quest for the Champions League trophy, by which time Mbappé will have played his last game for PSG having failed to win the trophy the club's cash-rich Qatari owners so crave.

Central defender Mats Hummels headed Dortmund into the final as the German team won 1-0 at PSG.

Moments after Warren Zaïre-Emery missed an open goal for PSG, Hummels rose unchallenged to head in Julian Brandt's corner from the left in the 50th minute.

Dortmund advanced 2-0 on aggregate and largely contained Mbappé, who is leaving at the end of the season.

PSG exerted late pressure. Goalkeeper Gregor Kobel palmed away Mbappé's low shot, then pushed Mbappé's deflected close-range effort onto the crossbar with a superb one-handed save. The Parc des Princes crowd groaned when midfielder



Vitinha's thumping 25-meter strike rattled the woodwork. Coach Edin Terzić's team will play either record 14-time champion Real Madrid or six-time winner Bayern Munich on June 1 at Wembley Stadium. Madrid and Bayern drew 2-2 in the first leg and play on Wednesday. "Extremely proud. I'm very happy," Terzić said. "We beat a team like PSG two times and we again kept a clean sheet. We started really well and kept them away from the goal."

Dortmund is on course for its second Champions League trophy after winning in 1997 and a third European trophy, having won the now defunct UEFA Cup Winners' Cup in 1966. Dortmund also reached the Champions League final in 2013, losing to Bayern. "Indescribable. After more than 10 years, I am in the final with Borussia again," said Marco Reus, Dortmund's veteran midfielder who is leaving the team after this season. "How

we won the game, no one will ask tomorrow. Shots against the post won't matter tomorrow." For PSG, it's another season ending without raising the trophy its cash-rich Qatari owners have chased after by spending huge amounts on star players like Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Neymar, Lionel Messi and Mbappé. PSG lost its only Champions League final in 2020 to Bayern. "Efficiency, that's what we were missing," PSG captain

Marquinhos said. "We should have defended better. They scored from a corner and a counter-attack (in the first leg). We created more chances but they won both games." As Dortmund's players celebrated, Mbappé looked dejected as he trudged for the last time in a Champions League game wearing a PSG jersey. He is widely expected to join Madrid. Moments before Dortmund's goal, Zaïre-Emery somehow hit the post from two meters

out after Gonçalo Ramos flicked on Mbappé's cross from the left.

On Hummels' goal, PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma again did not move off his line to claim the ball, having not done so when Barcelona scored on a corner from the left in the first leg of the quarterfinals.

Coach Luis Enrique's players seemed nervous, playing cautiously and defending too deeply in the first half, allowing Dortmund to settle into a comfortable rhythm.

Mbappé was ineffective in attack when PSG lost the first leg and, despite their speed, Mbappé and Ousmane Dembélé struggled to find space behind a well-organized Dortmund defense with midfielder Emre Can offering good protection.

It took 30 minutes before Mbappé and Zaïre-Emery freed Dembélé on the right of the penalty area, but he failed to hit the target.

Speedy left winger Karim Adeyemi did so for Dortmund five minutes later when a rapid counter-attack exposed PSG's defense, but Donnarumma rescued PSG with a fine low save.

Hummel's goal at least woke up PSG's attack, but Ramos missed the target when well-placed either side of a stinging shot from left back Nuno Mendes hitting the left post.



Neeraj to compete in India for first time in three years at Federation Cup

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will compete at home for the first time in three years after confirming participation in the National Federation Cup to be held in Bhubaneswar from May 12 to 15.

The 26-year-old superstar is expected to travel to India from Doha after opening his season in the first leg of the prestigious Diamond League series on May 10. "As per entries @Neeraj_chopra and Kishore Kumar Jena will compete in domestic competition starting May 12 in Bhubaneswar," the Athletics Federation of India tweeted.

Chopra's coach Klaus Bartonietz also confirmed to PTI that his ward is taking part

in the Bhubaneswar event.

The 28-year-old Kishore Jena, who won a silver in the Hangzhou Asian Games where Chopra won gold, will also be competing in the Doha Diamond League on May 10. Chopra last took part in a domestic competition at the same event on March 17, 2021, when he won a gold with a throw of 87.80m.

Since then, Chopra has won a historic gold in the Tokyo Olympics, became Diamond League champion in 2022, world champion in 2023 and defended Asian Games gold in China.

He also won three individual legs of Diamond League and claimed a silver in the 2022 World Championships.

He is, however, yet to touch the 90m mark. His personal best and national record is 89.94m.



PGA Championship invites seven LIV players to get top 100 in world

PTI ■ LOUISVILLE (US)

The PGA Championship officially has Tiger Woods in a field released that includes invitations to seven players from Saudi-funded LIV Golf, giving the major 99 of the 100 in the world ranking at Valhalla next week.

The PGA of America strives to have the top 100 in the world to maintain its reputation for having the strongest field of the four majors, although it is not part of the criteria. Those hopes ended late Tuesday when Rikuya Hoshino (No. 94) withdrew.

The PGA leans on a catch-all category of "special invitations." The group of LIV players includes Patrick Reed, whose tie for 12th in the Masters moved him inside the top 100. He is at No. 92, and the invitation keeps alive his streak of playing every major since the 2014 Masters.

The PGA Championship returns to Valhalla in Louisville, Kentucky, for the fourth time on May 16-19. Rory McIlroy won at Valhalla the last time it was there in 2014. The course is best known for Woods winning a playoff over Bob May in 2000 for his third straight major.

Joaquin Niemann, who won the Australian Open in December and has two LIV Golf wins this year, already received an invitation. The surprise was Talor Gooch announcing in an X post on Monday that he had been invited.

It was a sign the PGA of America's selection committee was looking at LIV results on their own, as Gooch doesn't play much outside the Saudi

league. He won three times on LIV in 2023 and won the season points list.

Other invitations went to Dean Burmester, Lucas Herbert and Adrian Meronk, all of them inside the top 100 in the world. The seventh invitation went to David Puig, the 22-year-old from Spain who is No. 106 in the ranking. Puig has finished in the top 10 in six of his last seven tournaments on the Asian Tour, including two wins.

LIV will be represented by 16 players, down from 18 a year ago. There might have been one more, except British Open champion Louis Oosthuizen turned down his invitation. Oosthuizen, who is No. 125 in the world, won twice late last year in South Africa in tournaments co-sanctioned by the European tour.

His manager, Carlos Rodriguez, said in a text message that Oosthuizen already had some personal commitments.

The LIV group includes defending champion Brooks Koepka, who goes for a fourth PGA Championship title. He is the only active LIV player to win a major.

Kerry Haigh, the championship director for the PGA of America, has said he would consider deserving players from tours around the world. Invitations were given to Tim Widing of Sweden, who has won consecutive tournaments on the Korn Ferry Tour.

Another invitation went to Kazuma Kobori, a 22-year-old born in Japan who now plays under the New Zealand flag. He has won three times this year in the Webex Players Series on the PGA Tour of Australasia.

Maradona World Cup Golden Ball trophy had mysteriously disappeared

AP ■ PARIS

It will be auctioned in Paris

Diego Maradona's Golden Ball trophy from the 1986 World Cup has resurfaced. The award, which had been missing for decades, will be auctioned in Paris next month, the Aguttes house said.

Maradona, who died in 2020 at age 60, was awarded the trophy for his scintillating play at the tournament, where he captained Argentina in its 3-2 win over West Germany in the final in Mexico City. Before that, he scored the controversial "Hand of God" goal and the "Goal of the Century" in a 2-1 win over England in the quarterfinals.

The auction house said it expects the trophy "to fetch millions due to its uniqueness. Maradona received the award - given to the tournament's best player - at a ceremony at the Lido cabaret on the Champs-Élysées in 1986. It subsequently disappeared, giving rise to rumors. Some say it was lost during a wild poker game, or sold to pay off debts, Aguttes said. Others said Maradona had stored it in a safe in a Naples bank that was robbed by local gangsters in 1989, when he played in the Italian league. According to the story told by



a reformed member of the mafia, the trophy was then melted down into gold pieces. "A far-fetched theory, given that it was made of a gold-copper alloy," Aguttes said in its auction catalogue.

Aguttes said the trophy reappeared in 2016 among other lots that were acquired from a private collection at auction in Paris.

"It was thoroughly investigated and authenticated as Diego Maradona's Adidas Golden Ball trophy," Aguttes said.

The "Hand of God" goal came when Maradona punched the ball into England's net for his team's opener. Maradona was also a magician with the ball at

his feet and four minutes later, he weaved through England's midfield and defense and then past goalkeeper Peter Shilton for what FIFA later declared the greatest goal in World Cup history.

"To say that this World Cup had it all would be an understatement ... It was also, and above all, the tournament where Diego Maradona really showed the world what he could do with his feet, and even with his hands," said François Thierry, a sports expert at Aguttes.

Bidders will be asked to make a deposit of 150,000 euros (\$161,000) to participate in the June 6 auction.

Asia needs its best players to compete in own tournaments: ATF president Yuriy Polskiy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Determined to change the face of Asian tennis in his tenure, Yuriy Polskiy, the youngest ATF President, has exhorted the best players from the region to compete in Asian events before travelling abroad and has set his sights on developing the game in smaller tennis-playing nations such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Syria.

The 36-year-old Polskiy had won the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) presidential elections in December last year on the back of reforms in his home country Kazakhstan and wants to use his troubleshooting experience to help nations struggling to popularise the game.

Polskiy is clear that Asia's strong players need to compete in their own events which should help upcoming players with exposure and learning, and a robust Asian tour and programme for U14 players with considerable financial support is the need of the hour.

He is also clear that ATF would work in tandem with ATP rather than competing with them and create a viable Asian tour with lots of tournaments in close vicinity that will reduce the travel expenses of players from the region.

Asia has only six players in the world's top-100 and it worries Polskiy. "Asian tennis needs the participation of the best Asian players in Asian



tournaments, because, quite often, they go to Europe, they go to North America, South America and it means that the local Asian players don't have a chance to compete with the best," Polskiy told PTI in an interview. "And to go to Europe, it's very costly. So the ones who are good, they spend a lot of money, which can be redistributed, you know, in order to increase the base, like you will send not only the best ones to tournaments, but the number two, three, four, because with the kids, you never know who will eventually be the best player.

"So, you need the competition inside the country, you need the competition inside of your region, and you need the high competition in Asia." Polskiy understands that Asia is very strong in the eastern countries such as Japan,

Korea, China, Taiwan, India, Thailand and Kazakhstan but the continent needs more tennis-playing nations.

"In recent years, Uzbekistan (grew), also Iran has a big history, and I feel that smaller nations like Iraq, Syria, Nepal, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and others, also deserve a chance, and they have big population."

Polskiy said they are now working with the Grand Slams, with ITF, in order to improve the quality of tournaments in Asia. The ATF President said the players will get incentives for playing in Asia.

"We (should) give extra incentives to good Asian players to play on Asian circuit. So they don't spend their time competing for nothing, there is something meaningful they get, they get the ranking, they get the grants, there is an Asian team of the best players in each age

category, so they can get in there and get extra support from ITF."

Asia's highest-ranked player is world No. 17 Alexander Bublik from Kazakhstan. The next best is China's Zhizhen Zhang (56) and is followed by Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko (60), Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka (80) and Taro Daniel (82) and India's Sumit Nagal (93).

"We should do better in ATP and WTA rankings. And I see several challenges which we need to overcome in that regard. First of all, Asia is quite divided and many big nations like Japan, China, India, many players do not participate in international tournaments.

"They play a lot inside their countries, they compete with local players. But to some extent, it can work. But for 16 year old (players), it's very difficult to stand the competition of countries located in Europe, where they compete with each other from a very young age.

"And in that regard, we do a lot of talking to nations, bringing new initiatives and hosting different tournaments. So everybody will come on board."

In the past, ATF had launched a closed-door circuit only for Asian players but it did not work. While it offered a lot of money to Asian players, absence of ATP ranking never allowed it to grow. Polskiy said he won't restart any such programme because he does not want to compete with ATP.

High hopes from Aman Sehrawat at last Olympic Qualifying event in Istanbul

PTI ■ ISTANBUL

The immensely-talented Aman Sehrawat and the experienced Deepak Punia will be followed keenly when they take to the mat to lock the men's freestyle quotas for Paris Olympics at the World Qualifiers beginning here on Thursday.

It is the last event to secure spot for the Paris Games.

There were high hopes that U23 world champion Aman would qualify for the Games either at the World Championships or the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek but both the chances were lost.

While Aman (57kg) bumped into a strong opponent in Gulomjon Abdullaev in the quota-deciding bout in Bishkek, both World Championships silver medalist Deepak (86kg) and Sujet Kalkal (65kg) could not reach Bishkek on time after being stuck in Dubai due to storm.

Now it's a do-or-die situation for all Indian wrestlers at Istanbul where the two finalists in each category will be awarded the quotas. A third quota will be given to the wrestlers who emerges winner in the bout between the two bronze medalists.

The tournament will begin with Greco Roman style and followed by women's and freestyle on the last two days of the four-day qualifying competition.

None of the Indian men's wrestlers has so far got a quota and drawing a blank



will be a huge embarrassment for the country that took some major strides in international wrestling before the protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh halted the progress. Endurance has always been the strong point of Indian wrestlers but their preparations have suffered in the absence of national camps and competitions due to protest.

Usually, the Indian wrestlers tire their opponents out but for that to happen, it is important to stretch the bout to full six minutes. It's a strategy that Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya have employed although the latter has always been aggressive and finishes the bout in a jiffy. "If the bouts lasts full distance, Aman can beat any wrestler, so managing the first three minutes are crucial. He was obviously very disappointed for what happened in Bishkek," said coach Praveen Dahiya who trained him for four years before being shifted out of Chattrasal Stadium.



RESURGENT RCB TAKE ON ERRATIC PBKS IN BATTLE OF SURVIVAL

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

A resurgent Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look for their fourth consecutive victory when they face an unpredictable Punjab Kings as the two sides fight for survival in the Indian Premier League, here on Thursday. After a horrendous start to the season, RCB have managed to claw their way back into the tournament. They have the winning momentum on their side, having won their last three games comprehensively. The wins have not only boosted their sagging morale but also taken them to the seventh spot in the points table. With eight points from 11 games, RCB can still make the playoffs if they win all their remaining three fixtures although the chances are slim. Punjab Kings too stare at a similar situation. They occupy the eighth spot, having collected eight points from 11 games. However, between the two -- only one team can reach the



all-important 14 points mark. Having beaten PBKS earlier in the season and heading to this clash with three wins on the trot, RCB will feel more confident than the hosts. Virat Kohli remains consistent at the top, while skipper Faf du Plessis broke his string of poor

scores with a belligerent knock in the last game. Will Jacks also impressed with a match-winning century against GT, and Cameron Green showcased his all-round skills with crucial contributions in runs and wickets against Sunrisers

Hyderabad. Their bowling department has started clicking with Mohammed Siraj, who is in India's T20 World Cup squad, finally finding his rhythm. Yash Dayal and Vijaykumar Vyshak also did well against GT and RCB will expect them

to continue in the same vein. PBKS, on the other hand, will be low on confidence having suffered an inexplicable batting collapse against Chennai Super Kings. The Kings showcased their very best and worst against CSK. Their bowlers were all over the CSK batters but the batting unit choked. It was an example of how Punjab's season has been this year -- unpredictable. They have showcased their potential with away wins over Kolkata Knight Riders, when they recorded the highest successful run chase in T20 cricket, and CSK. However, they have faced difficulties getting the job done at home. They won just one out of five games in Mullanpur, their main home ground. A change in venue to the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium also didn't go their way in the previous game here. The team would hope to end its home run on a high but for that to happen, the PBKS unit has to fire in unison.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Home Finance Registered office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai- 400015
 Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai- 400059
 Branch Office: Sky Park, Ground floor, Unit No.1, Near Canal Road Raipur- 492001

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Home Finance Company Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of property/ Date of Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Chinmay Majumdar (Borrower), Jolly Majumdar (Co-Borrower), LHRPR00001295224.	Plot No. A-10 Vip City, Ph No. 109/44, Rnm Raipur Ward No. 26, Thakre Ward, Mauja Saddu Ward No. 26 Raipur- 492001. Bounded By- North: Road, South: Plot No. A-09, East: Road, West: Plot No. B-05./ Date of Possession-03-05-2024	16-02-2023 Rs. 26,53,263/-	Raipur- B
2.	Chinmay Majumdar (Borrower), Jolly Majumdar (Co-Borrower), NHRPR00001295225	Plot No. A-10 Vip City, Ph No. 109/44, Rnm Raipur Ward No. 26, Thakre Ward, Mauja Saddu Ward No. 26 Raipur- 492001. Bounded By- North: Road, South: Plot No. A-09, East: Road, West: Plot No. B-05./ Date of Possession- 03-05-2024	16-02-2023 Rs. 2,98,671/-	Raipur- B

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : May 09, 2024
 Place: Raipur
 Authorized Officer
 ICICI Home Finance Company Limited



Jaiswal has got very good chance of breaking my records: Brian Lara

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Yashasvi Jaiswal's Test career is just nine games old but the great Brian Lara feels if there is anyone who can get close to his lofty feats, including the record 400 not out, it is the 22-year-old southpaw from India. Lara's high praise for Jaiswal doesn't come out of the blue. The left two-handers share a special bond, having spent a lot of time over the past year following their "4 am conversation" during the IPL when the West Indian was coaching Sunrisers Hyderabad and the young opener was in the Rajasthan Royals' camp. A lot has changed since IPL 2023 with Jaiswal now becoming an integral part of India's Test and T20 team. His exploits in the longest format stand out as he averages close to 70 with three hundreds including two double tons in the recent home series against England. What has impressed Lara is Jaiswal's ability to change gears as per the situation of the game. "If I feel my records are threatened, Jaiswal has got a very good chance to do so. He has got capabilities, couple of double hundreds already. He is that good," Lara told PTI editors at its headquarters in an interaction arranged by Star Sports where he is a commentator and expert for the ongoing IPL. Lara, who recently turned 55, is one of the all-time greats of the game having amassed close to 12,000 runs in Tests and over 10,000 runs in ODIs. His record of the highest individual total, 400 not out against England in 2004, still stands tall. Lara fondly looked back at his first meeting with Jaiswal when asked about a light moment they shared on the sidelines of the Rajasthan Royals and SRH clash in the ongoing season. "The only thing I can reveal about that (conversation) is I think he is an outstanding young cricketer. What I like about him is that he is very humble and willing to work. The first time I met him (last year), I immediately found myself attached to him.

"After the game (SRH vs Royals), I went to the hotel with a friend of mine from the Caribbean who knew Jos Buttler. It was midnight and Jaiswal found me. I promise you I left the hotel at 4 in the morning. "He just wanted to hear more and more and more. That is one of his amazing traits. His ability to want to learn as much as possible. Our conversations are about trying to make him a better cricketer. I am available for anyone that has my number. I am happy to talk cricket." Being a left-hander himself, it is natural for Lara to be biased towards that tribe. Another southpaw he has great admiration for is Abhishek Sharma with whom he spent time at SRH. "Again he is someone who I met while I was batting coach of SRH. I spent two years there. I am allowed to a bit biased when I see a left-hander, I just love a left-hander. Myself and Abhishek have developed a very good relationship, these youngsters are very humble. They want to learn. "What I like about these two, they want to get to great heights. I have great admiration for both." The legend from Trinidad reckons that usually records are threatened by batters who score quickly and Jaiswal has that ability along with the hunger to bat long. His 400 not out has not been surpassed in 20 years and Lara hopes he is still around to see the day when his record is broken. "I think now, the pace that these guys are batting at. And you look at the guys over the years who have challenged that 300-mark and plus. It's Chris Gayle. It's Virender Sehwag. It's Sanath Jayasuriya. It's Inzamam-ul-Haq. It's Matthew Hayden. These are guys who destroy bowling attacks. "...You would not say that for a Rahul Dravid or Steve Smith in the present case. But a player who likes to score quickly, will have an opportunity. You know, Jaiswal, I mean, I was in Australia when David Warner came close and you know, he's an aggressive player.

RR captain Samson fined 30 per cent match fees for breaching IPL Code of Conduct

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson has been fined 30 per cent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his side's 20-run loss to Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium here. The offence committed by Samson, who made 86 during RR's unsuccessful run chase of 222 on Tuesday, was not specified but it could be for arguing with the umpires when he was given out after Shai Hope took a catch just near the boundary ropes in the 16th over. The question was whether Hope's feet touched the boundary ropes while taking the catch. The third umpire ruled Samson out but the RR skipper was not happy. He initially started walking towards the pavilion, only to

return to the middle and have some words with the on-field umpires. "Samson committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Match Referee's decision is final and binding," the IPL said in a statement. A Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct includes "excessive, obvious disappointment with an Umpire's decision; an obvious delay in resuming play or leaving the wicket; requesting a referral to the TV Umpire and arguing or entering into a prolonged discussion with the Umpire about his/her decision." On April 10 also, Samson was fined Rs 12 lakh after RR

maintained a slow over rate during their match against Gujarat Titans in Jaipur.



IDFC FIRST Bank Limited

(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited) | CIN : L6510TN2014PLC097792
 Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai- 600031.
 Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13 (2) OF THE SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002

The following borrowers and co-borrowers availed the below mentioned secured loans from IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited) the loans of the below-mentioned borrowers and co-borrowers have been secured by the mortgage of their respective properties. As they have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions of the respective loan agreements and had become irregular, their loan were classified as NPA as per the RBI guidelines. Amounts due by them to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited) are mentioned as per respective notices issued more particularly described in the following table and further interest on the said amounts shall also be applicable and the same will be charged as per contractual rate with effect from their respective dates.

Sr No.	Loan Account No.	Type of Loan	Name of borrowers and co-borrowers	Section 13 (2) Notice Date	Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice	Property Address
1	41462257	Home Loan	1. Dilip Kumar Dewangan 2. Sushila Devi Dewangan	25.04.2024	INR 48,15,258.59/-	All That Piece And Parcel Of Flat No. C-201, Admeasuring Area 1280 Sq. Ft. Le 118.96 Sq. Mtrs (Super Built-up Area) On Second Floor, Block-C, Of A Multistoried Complex Known As "Vrindavan Garden" Comprised Under Part Of Kharsa Nos. 728/1-2-3, 731/3-4, Situated At Mouza Gram: Daldal Seoni, Kushabhau Thakre Ward, Ward No. 26, P.H. No. 109/14, R.N.M-Raipur-1, Tehsil & District: Raipur, Chhattisgarh - 492014, And Bounded As: East: Open, West: Flat No. C-202, North: Corridor, South: Balcony

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited) as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc., within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited). Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.

Date : 09.05.2024
 Place : Chhattisgarh
 Authorized Officer
 IDFC First Bank Limited
 (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC First Bank Limited)

ADITYA BIRLA CAPITAL

PROTECTING INVESTING FINANCING ADVISING

Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd.

Registered Office: Indian Rayon Compound, Veraval, Gujarat 362266.
 Branch Office: Aditya Birla Housing Finance, Sky Park, Unit Nos. 402 & 403, 4th Floor, Adjacent G E Road, Ravi Nagar, Opp. Rani Sati Mandir, Raipur, Chhattisgarh-492001
 Contact No.: 1. ABHFL: Authorized Officer Mr. Deepak Patel Contact: 918109349096, Mr. Dineshwar Nishad Contact: 919303990002 Chirag Lokhande: Contact: 919773758208
 2. Auction Service Provider (ASP)- M/s. Globe Tech Infosystems Private Limited - Mr. Samir Chakravorty

SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Asset(s) under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to rule 8(6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/charged to the Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited/Secured Creditor, the possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited/Secured Creditor, will be put to sale by auction on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on 29-05-2024, for recovery of Rs. 66,35,138.13/- (Rupees Sixty Six Lacs Thirty Five Thousand One Hundred Thirty Eight and Thirteen paise Only) as on 10-11-2022 and further interest and other expenses thereon till the date of realization, due to Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited/Secured Creditor from the Borrowers namely Chandrakant Satpute , MIS Chandrakant Cycle Stores, Satish Satpute.

The reserve price will be INR 1,50,06,647/- (Rupees One Crore Fifty Lacs Six Thousand Six Hundred and Forty Seven Only) and the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) will be INR 15,00,665/- (Rupees Fifteen Lacs Six Hundred and Sixty Five Only). The last date of EMD deposit is 28-05-2024. The date for inspection of the said property is fixed on 27-05-2024 between 11:00 am to 04:00 pm.

DESCRIPTION OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

All That Piece And Parcel Of Nazul Sheet No. 36/C, Plot No. 59/1, Area Measuring 44.25 Sq. Mtrs. I.E., 476.13 Sq. Ft., Situated At Mouza-Jamalpara, Ward No-21, Npn-Rng R.I.C. Rng 1 Tah & Distt. Rajnandgaon, C.G.-491441, And Bounded As: North: Awaadhram, South: Gali, East: Gali, West: Gali

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited/Secured Creditor's website i.e. https://homefinance.adityabirlacapital.com/properties-for-auction-under-sarfaesi-act or https://BestAuctionDeal.com
 Date: 09-05-2024
 Place: Raipur
 Authorized Officer
 (Aditya Birla Housing Finance Limited)

AU SMALL FINANCE BANK LIMITED (A SCHEDULED COMMERCIAL BANK)

Regd. Office: 19-A, Dhuleshwar Garden, Ajmer Road, Jaipur - 302001, Rajasthan, (India). | CIN:L36911RJ1996PLC011381

APPENDIX-IV-A- [See proviso to rule 8(6)] Sale notice for sale of immovable properties

E-auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s)/ Co-Borrower (s)/Mortgagor (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable properties mortgaged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of AU Small Finance Bank Limited (A Scheduled Commercial Bank), the same shall be referred herein after as AUSFB. The Secured Assets will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis through E-Auction for recovery of amount mentioned in the table below along with further interest, cost, charges and expenses being due to AUSFB viz. Secured Creditor.

It is hereby informed you that we are going to conduct public E-Auction through website <https://sarfaesi.auctiontiger.net>

Loan A/C No./ Name of Borrowers/Co-Borrowers/Mortgagors/Guarantor	Date & Amount of 13(2) Demand Notice	Date Of Possession	Description of Property	Reserve Price For Property	Earnest Money For Property	Date & Time Of E-Auction	Date of Bid Submission	E-Auction Place of Tender Submission	Contact Person and Property Visit Date
(Loan A/C No.) L9001060717682968, Kashyap Construction Through Its Proprietor Mukavan Das Kashyap (Borrower), Mukavan Das Kashyap S/O Ganesh Ram Kashyap (Co-Borrower & Mortgagor), Smt. Laxmi Kashyap W/O Mukavan Das Kashyap (Co-Borrower & Mortgagor)	07-May-21 Rs. 52,49,127/- Rs. Fifty Two Lac Forty Nine Thousand One Hundred Twenty Seven Only As On 07-May-21	19-Jun-23	Residential House Bearing Part Of Kharsa No. 541/1, Situated At Mouja, Tikrapara, Krishna Nagar, Ravindranath Tagore Ward No. 51, P.H. No. 114/69/70, R.I.C. Raipur-1, Teh & Distt. - Raipur, CG Admeasuring - 1500 Sq. Ft.	Rs. 37,00,000/- Rs. Thirty Seven Lakh Only.	Rs. 3,70,000/- Rs. Three Lakh Seventy Thousand Only.	12-Jun-24 2.00 PM to 4.00 PM with unlimited extension of 5 minutes	On or Before 10-Jun-24	AU Small Finance Bank Ltd., Branch Address :- Sky park, 3rd Floor, Canal Linking road, Raja Talab, Raipur, CG.	Gopal Das Bairagi & Bhanu Pratap Singh 7610210556 9773358234 auctions@aubank.in 07-Jun-24
(Loan A/C No.) L9001060715301752 & L9001060818322004, Chandan Machhu S/O Tikechan Machhu (Borrower), Smt. Anita W/O Chandan Machhu (Co-Borrower), Tikechand Machhu S/O Bhima Machhu (Co-Borrower)	17-Jan-22 Rs. 15,63,004/- Rs. Fifteen Lac Sixty Three Thousand Four Only and Rs. 11,28,472/- Rs. Eleven Lac Twenty Eight Thousand Four Hundred Seventy Two Only As On 13-Jan-22	22-Feb-24	Property Situated At Part Of Kharsa No. - 644/1, Village - Jhagrendhi, Tehsil - Pithora, P.H.No. - 37, R.N.M. - Sankara, Dist. Mahasamund, (C.G) Admeasuring 4305.564 Sq. Ft.	Rs. 31,00,000/- Rs. Thirty One Lakh Only.	Rs. 3,10,000/- Rs. Three Lakh Ten Thousand Only.	12-Jun-24 2.00 PM to 4.00 PM with unlimited extension of 5 minutes	On or Before 10-Jun-24	AU Small Finance Bank Ltd., Branch Address :- 1st Floor, Nearby Mahindra Tractor Showroom, Raipur Road, Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh - 493445	Gopal Das Bairagi & Bhanu Pratap Singh 7610210556 9773358234 auctions@aubank.in 07-Jun-24
(Loan A/C No.) L9001060715206111, Bisnu Singh S/O Bhudan Singh (Borrower), Saraswati Singh Rajvanshi W/O Vishnu Singh Rajvanshi (Co-Borrower)	17-Jan-22 Rs. 25,13,824/- Rs. Twenty-Five Lac Thirteen Thousand Eight Hundred Twenty-Four Only As On 13-Jan-22	24-Apr-23	Property Situated At Ph No 15, Kh. No. 493/12, 515/78, 493/345, 515/5, 515/6, Ward No. 1, Ribhothi, At- Athakatesh, Dist.- Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh Admeasuring 1889 Sq. Ft.	Rs. 12,00,000/- Rs. Twelve Lakh Only.	Rs. 1,20,000/- Rs. One Lakh Twenty Thousand Only.	29-May-24 2.00 PM to 4.00 PM with unlimited extension of 5 minutes	On or Before 27-May-24	AU Small Finance Bank Ltd., Branch Address :- Vijay Plaza, Beside Menonete Church, Bastar Road, Dhamtari 493773	Gopal Das Bairagi & Bhanu Pratap Singh 7610210556 9773358234 auctions@aubank.in 24-May-24

The terms and conditions of e-auction sale:-
 (1). The E-Auction sale of Secured Asset is on "as is where is", "as is what is", "whatever there is" and "no recourse" basis for and on behalf of the Secured Creditor viz. AUSFB and there is no known encumbrance which exists on the said property.
 (2). For participating in online e-auction sale, Bid document, copies of PAN Card, Board Resolution in case of Company and photo ID, address proof are required to be submitted along with EMD, which is payable by way of RTGS/NEFT/DD in the name of MSME AUCTION POOL ACCOUNT OF AU Small Finance Bank Limited, Current account No. 1921201121711599 AU SMALL FINANCE BANK LIMITED Fifth and Sixth Floor Sunny Big Junction STC Kharsa No. 64 to 67, Gram Sukhaipura New Atish Market Jaipur 302020, IFSC Code: AUBL0002011, Once an Online Bid is submitted, same cannot be withdrawn. Further any EMD submitted by bidder will be required to send the UTR/Ref no./DD no. of the RTGS/NEFT/DD with a copy of cancelled cheque on the following email IDs i.e. auctions@aubank.in
 (3). All interested participants / bidders are requested to visit the website <https://sarfaesi.auctiontiger.net> & <https://www.aubank.in/bank-auction> for further details including Terms & Conditions, to take part in e-auction sale proceeding and are also advised to contact Mr. Bhanu Pratap Singh, Contact Number 9358002663 and e-mail of auctions@aubank.in
Please Note: This is also a 15 days & 30 days notice under Rule 8(6) read with Rule 9(1) to the Borrowers/Co Borrowers/Mortgagors of the above said loan account about sale through tender / inter se bidding on the above-mentioned date. The property will be sold, if their outstanding dues are not repaid in full by the borrower in the given notice period.
 Date : 08/05/2024
 Place : Chhattisgarh
 Authorized Officer
 AU Small Finance Bank Limited